



jubilat
thirteen

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Interview
Mark Levine

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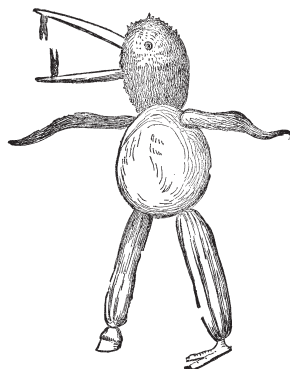
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Cover photograph by Glenn Gordon.

ALIEN SHAWL

Stephanie Cleveland

The perimeter gave way to a Canada
goose, who almost crossed her legs and put them under
the kitchen table. At times men merged and changed
gears, instead of cars.

Interstates. The wild male gangs feel uncertain,
how to err when they wear little
microphones, seek Selah, and DNA, as did Moses.

Suck my neck

—says the *screech owl*,

in the middle of the century. What hole between legs
we're named for?—For the sandal that hurt us—

Ninth percent, solar plexus. We sat
on a blackout sun. Did you not put me under
the Yuka tree? That's fucking
crazy. Does anyone know what naïve means?

THE NEW OBLIVION

David Sewell

I was in no way overqualified
to operate the seismometer,
which you referred to as the refrigerator.
I was barely qualified to operate your brassiere.
Still I tried. Six years lying naked on the floor,
trying to decipher the earth's intimations.
I suggested we get a horse for the apartment,
something sturdy and gray. It's said
they can sense things preternaturally.
So that we could go out more,
throw baked beans at the river,
like we did when we were orphans.
But you said no. You said I don't think so.
Because of society, I suspected.
Whether you nodded or whether
you'd been moved by an aftershock—
impossible to tell. Because I'd stood up.
This was the way to address you, you'd said.
You said trousers. You said *fenêtre*.
I said the mattress cannot be trusted.
The sky is a blister. I said a lot of things
then. I held you up to the lightbulb,
peered into you like a negative.
All wrong. It was a postcard you'd become.
So I replied. Are there active volcanoes
or just vespers and bones? The crags,
are they dappled with birds as white

as my skin? You shook like a comma.
I hoped that you'd write again.

ASSUMED SAVAGE: I

C.M. Burroughs

Flour moth in lush *lush* (y' hear?)
yard. White a-quaint-ant asks if

you Need something?

I am Black. I am
reaching into my coat
(Below Coats) for cash.

This *hello, how are you*—
dialect—is strange fruit. It is
plum-black/broke blood—*fine*.
I'm fine. And you?

(without answer without
pause) *Do You Need Something*

Punctuated (marked) by visioning My hand in her
man's (my friend's) coat—My hand gripping his

(b)ills—I'm getting some

cash, I say. *From my boyfriend's coat?*

look.

My coat (MY) is here—

look.

(smile) oh (smile) sorry (~~smile~~ grimace)

*I'm sorry. It's just that my best friend's wallet was stolen
last week, so—*

So

So . . . (LOOK)

I'm just apologizing—

just *adj.* 1, right in law or ethics; 2, fair-minded; good in intention; impartial:
I'm just— :4, in correct accordance with a standard

(look.)

IN THE PERSONAL CAMP, EROTICISM

Once I find the maze opening to the canebrake, I see we are still quite removed from Escape. You are black under the chassis . . . detergent and oil puddling across your black skin. You are so beautiful I say it, *You are so beautiful*. Body.

I join you, stick my fingers into the organs or engine, everything so warm so dark I can't tell. I move my hand in to the wrist, fix it when your mouth opens with sight. Your own wrist, rotal against some metal; one of us, man/machine/ovary, guns to life. I feel that

we will get away.

MERCERIZER

Albert Flynn DeSilver

Mercy me, says oh my meninges, says, this is visceral work, this being human is a gate-house, a gut-house, a house of guesswork and windmills. Says again and again, how the arteries of my lower extremities are an architecture of scarlet wicker, a basket of asterisks. Says my thinking is the same, yet tinged an invisible blue gone begging across the distances. Says oh my meninges over and over, my little rucksack braincape, my cupped borderland of anxiety. Says my work in the world is mercy, says how understanding holds people's rage at bay, the way my meninges holds my brain in place. Says your work is to have mercy upon me, understand me, my identity is a dead end, my thoughts a collection of clipped wings.

WHO NEVER COMBS THE MOONLIGHT

Tanya Larkin

Never slops himself home smeared with pollen
or pisses through a keyhole in lieu of a doorbell
or a good old-fashioned serenade

Who pours his luck into my hair and never goes then no
so every boot-heel an hour to my head leaves me punctuated mean
my music so cruel it swells from scene to scene

Or he who never cries milk! or slips on his tears
double-jointed and buttered with time he never springs to his feet
speaking of cabbage and my breasts on the fire hissing their fate

Whose sadness has cheeks I never pinch or bite or swallow
in a fit of baby-envy I spit onto the roof never do I hold them
or coo into their hollows waiting for the echo to pulse through my face

Never into soil do I shove my arms thinking now I am armless my song
will be pure
Never do I sing that song to the blown-out crashed-over mouths of the
moon
which have waited so long for solid food and will go on waiting and
waiting

Because somewhere someone not pulling him from a well
not breathing him awake not sponging him down with rotting fruit
or dragging him up the palace steps

Somewhere I never stand with blood in my shoes
and the moon as my mouth oh starveling prince look
I am standing in the baby pool greased for the cold

NOTEBOOK C: ON THE DISCOMFORT OF BEING IN TIME

Ellen Hinsey

{A.}

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Fate

Our first quandary is that our fate is the result of another's will. To be willed into the world without our knowledge.

What is chosen can be *discarded*; what is not chosen must be *borne*.

Addendum

Since life itself is never strictly *chosen*, it always bears the nature of a pilgrimage.

Original Sin

Not to understand what crime we have committed to deserve our discomfort.

Perplexing Given

That the pilgrimage's route is always edged by Wonder's unexpected but felicitous thistles.

{B.}

IMPERFECTION

Mistake

Evolution has seen to it that we can never quite grasp that life's imperfection is its condition *sine qua non*, and not an arbitrary mistake.

That life is lived like the two cities on Achilles' great shield: between the innocent joys of the wedding party—and the simple herdsmen murdered in the field.

That Life wills to undo itself by degrees—this incomprehensible deception.

Verticality

To be upright is to be wedged between imperfection and epiphany.

Ongoing Hope

That verticality can change the intrinsic nature of *being*—undo its lowly shuffling.

On the Contrary

Being-in-time is reigned over by its animality—its lumbering.

{C.}
TRAJECTORY

Passage

To *exist in time* is to pass through its eternal valley, encountering its unconquerable furies—

The *fury of desire* that devours as it fulfils—like Prometheus chained to his fate;

The *fury of self-deception*—that separates the *self* from its own native element;

The *fury of world-restlessness*—that casts us out from living in the balm of time.

See Above

The Mind imagines a singular passage through time, while—aware of perpetual cyclicism—the lamenting mouth sprouts its black orchids.

Late Knowledge

That suffering is a rare genus of flower that blooms on the stalk of *being*.

Enduring Challenge

The verb *to be* presents its choices: to bloom with Time or to wantonly dig up the garden.

{D.}
MULTIPLICITY

Limitation

To be human is to come to terms with the fact that *being* discourages the experience of *sympathetic multiplicity*.

To never reside within the *intellect of ice*, the *just omnipotence of sunlight*, the *communal grace of water*.

To be singular: this obscure form of sorrow.

Not a Contradiction

To endure the perplexity of *being*—poised between *singularity* and *oneness*—as if straddling the twin banks of a river which has no shores.

If Not, a Different Type of Arrival

To be at home for one moment in *insight*, as one would be in the four miraculous dimensions.

Addendum

To have a grasp of *multiplicity* is to be forever restless after its shadow.

{E.}

RECONCILIATION

Envy

One comes to envy Sisyphus, for all his eternity and task: to understand one's fate fully, no matter how banal, and to be called to fulfill it with no fear of temporality.

Impossibility

To pause along the Pilgrimage's path, to halt in the constant gesture of *always-coming-into-being*.

Unexpected Release

Brief moments of respite: peace in the *chakra* of midday. Silence, the insects intent on their metallic swelling, the heat pressing down on each waxy leaf.

And for a moment, everything almost *in* it. Residing in the belly of it.

The Dream

To break open Time like a husk and examine its luminous, glowing seeds.

Naïve Theorem

Time, like gravity alone, is not sufficient to destroy us.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LYING

Joshua Marie Wilkinson

after Aaron Kunin

In the foreground, we
encounter a peculiar

music of keys, of laundry
being unfolded, of machines

building new machines
to show us how sadness

works in a loop. We
discover that the truth

is wired to rooms
our children continually

rename. We move through
them without moonlight

without any pencils
to weather out our findings.

Even our findings become
the city around us—bunkered up,

unstuck from the trees, fizzing
in the wires we think are missing.

INTERVIEW WITH MARK LEVINE

Mark Levine is the author of three collections of poetry: *Debt* (1993), *Enola Gay* (2000), and *The Wilds* (2007). *F5*, a nonfiction account of a natural disaster in the 1970s, will be published in June 2007. He has been the recipient of the Hodder Fellowship in the Humanities at Princeton, a Whiting Writers' Award, and a fellowship from the NEA. His poetry has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Fence*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere; his nonfiction has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Outside*, and other places. He was born in New York City and grew up in Toronto, and he lives in Brooklyn and Iowa City, where he teaches poetry at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. This interview was conducted during fall 2005 and winter 2006 by Srikanth Reddy.

In the title poem from Enola Gay there's a moment when the speaker, surveying an absurdist apocalyptic landscape, suddenly announces that "I am with child." For some reason, I find myself thinking of that line often. It's always struck me as totally bizarre, and yet somehow utterly appropriate for the occasion of the poem. Well, it's years after the publication of that book, and I hear you're going to be a father pretty soon! [Applause.] But I'm still puzzled by that line from long ago. When you wrote that, were you anticipating fatherhood way off on the distant horizon, or worrying about how having a child might affect your writing life someday, or somehow testing the limits of what could be said by your presumably male speaker? What on earth could you have possibly meant at the time?

Your sources are correct. At this advanced moment in the process I am positively big with child. (You should see Emily.) And, as I wrote in the next line of that poem, "This time it's a child." It does seem—not having read the poem in about five years, until your question inspired me to take a look (with one hand over my eyes)—like an outlandish thing to have said. I know that I have always found the phrase "with child" to be wonderfully

weird, as though “child” were some abstract, mystical form. (Which, to be frank, at this point, for me—it is.) Where else but in poetry, or in an asylum, can a sort-of-grown man not only say such a thing, but say it and mean it—and feel it to be true? I have always adored Sidney’s line, toward the end of the first sonnet in *Astrophil and Stella*: “Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes. . . .” One doesn’t need to have had a child—only to have been one, once, I suppose—to recognize that “The Child is father of the Man,” and that we often hang out, simultaneously, in overlapping chronologies (nowhere more so than in poetry), and occupy roles that would seem to be mutually exclusive. Perhaps I just have womb envy.

And do you think that, on some unconscious level, you knew that you were in one sense writing about your future child?

It always surprises me (and sometimes worries me) to realize, long after the fact, how little aware I am—or how ill-informed I am—of what my preoccupations are when I’m writing, and how very partial is my understanding and command of what I’m saying. I would never have believed that, in some ways, I could have been thinking about paternity when I wrote *Enola Gay*, ten years ago. For several years, the title poem of my new book, *The Wilds*, was called “On His First Son”—until I made the change recently. Yet I certainly had no sense that I was, to some extent, addressing myself in that poem to the unforeseen prospect of my own future son. I don’t know what I thought—whether I was trying to write as my own father, addressing me; or as myself, giving birth, so to speak, to a kind of understanding of my father; or neither of the above; or both. It may not be very respectable to admit to being clueless about what could be considered very fundamental questions of subject matter in poetry, but that’s how it is for me. It’s possible that I would have imagined that to say “mother” and “father” and “child” in a poem was doing nothing more than designating figures. I probably had a well-rehearsed abhorrence of the personal in poetry. I was kidding myself, though.

It sounds to me like you're very wary of thinking too much about—or theorizing—what you're doing as a poet while you're in the act of writing.

It troubles me a bit that, as poets, we seem to be required to pretend that everything we put in poems emerges from a very supportable rationale. Maybe we've been successfully cowed by those who are hostile to poetry, and have internalized their suspicion that the whole thing is a sham, an elitist attempt to confound and mock the guileless reader. And so we apologetically, or pompously, give in to this rather recent expectation that artists are supposed to talk a good game about what they do. I'll tell you, I once spent a week interviewing the skateboarder Tony Hawk—a bit before he became a multinational industry—and here's what I liked best about him: great skateboarder, not great interview subject. Every time he got on his board it was magic; every time he opened his mouth it was, well, pretty ordinary stuff. His intelligence was thoroughly absorbed in what he did, and to him, talking about it was not only irrelevant—it was almost a violation of the spirit of his sport. This seems appropriate. By now, I've spent enough time around young people who are trying to write poems to recognize the common anxiety, even embarrassment, at simply being a poet, rather than pretending to be a poet and an eager A-student rolled up into a single reasonable package. But why, with all the hand-wringing poetry talk out there—our own, no doubt, included—are there some matters that, it seems, are very rarely aired, even in the supposedly brass-tacks environment of the poetry workshop? Embarrassing questions, like: How much do you know what your poem is about when you're writing it? Do you know who is speaking? Do you know what the situation is? Do you know what your themes are? When you get right down to it: Do you know what is happening—what is going on—in your poem when you are writing it? I don't know about you, Chicu, but I'd often be lying if I answered most of these questions in the affirmative. I don't even want to be able to say “yes.” If I could, I'd wonder why I was writing a poem.

Maybe we need others to tell us what we're doing as artists (or skateboarders) in order to understand for ourselves what our concerns may be?

A student of mine, a very intelligent one, pointed out to me at a party that my conversation seemed to return frequently to questions of childhood—my own, hers, those of others, not to mention the status of childhood generally. She wondered if I was obsessed with the subject. I was really taken aback, because I always thought of myself as someone who was deeply and distinctly uninterested in childhood, and who would certainly never write poems about childhood—indeed, there was a type of “poem of memory” (what an awful phrase) that I felt I had actively scorned since I started writing poems. But after the student made that remark to me, I took a look at the poems I was writing, and poems I had written in my previous books—and I even thought about some nonfiction I had written, which tended to be on topics that were assigned to me, like skateboarding, and were rarely of my choosing—and I thought, good God, I’m someone who is preoccupied by childhood and memory, and I had thought of myself in completely the opposite terms.

So, to return to a question you posed so long ago you may have forgotten it: I have no idea what effect having a child will have on my poetry. I have been very lucky to spend a second childhood (years twenty to forty) writing poetry, it would seem, out of the first childhood. There’s something about that cusp of consciousness that a child is perched on that is powerful to me, much as I’m drawn to the sensation of undocumented, or unconfirmable, memory. Like any parent-to-be, I guess, I’m really, really curious about what I can learn about human beings by watching one develop in front of me. The process seems like poetry to me, though I’m not thinking about it in terms of something as menial as “getting material” for poems. After a while, the only reason I can see to write poems is out of personal need, and it’s very hard to say what the need will be once the little guy arrives. But I probably say that only because I am currently so full of terrified anticipation.

As a former baby myself, I find the subject endlessly interesting. I thought it was pretty fascinating (and deeply weird) that you'd been thinking about calling the title poem of the new book "On His First Son" for years before the proverbial twinkle in your eye. And I vaguely remember hearing somewhere that you'd once thought of Debt as being in some ways a book of the father, and of Enola Gay as being a book of the mother, which makes me feel like The Wilds (a book of the child) might complete that family logic?

But what I want to focus on is what you described as "that cusp of consciousness that a child is perched on," and how it shapes your sense of what poetry is. That cusp of consciousness seems a lot like the threshold between knowing and uncertainty that Keats described as negative capability. And I'd agree enthusiastically that this cusp or threshold is the most productive space for a poet to inhabit. But lately I've also been worried that uncertainty lets one off the ethical hook—it lets one, as it were, refuse to grow up. I guess my vague feelings of guilt about not speaking up more about the political situation over recent years has something to do with this. In the lead-up to the war, for instance, I felt uncertain about whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction tucked away somewhere in Mesopotamia (among many other things), and my general reluctance to forcefully decide matters for myself mirrored, I think, a broader failure of liberals to dissent from what our nation is perpetrating abroad. That's a detour, I know, but what I'm getting at is a sense that there is a danger to uncertainty. I'm definitely not advocating a more political poetry—Lord knows I find most overtly political verse to be fairly unliterary—but I'm wondering what you think about the ethics of uncertainty as a poet writing today.

I know what you're saying, but the thought of assuming a certain kind of ethical responsibility in poems makes me bristle a bit. Do you remember when you were younger and some snide kid told you to "grow up"? I think I can still hear that voice. I hated that kid. What he was really saying was: Don't be yourself. Don't have an imagination. Behave. I'm just not interested in growing up in those ways. (On the other hand, I already

find myself mourning a certain kind of bygone communal maturity—the days when people could disagree about poetics and politics in respectful and civil ways, without needing to assault each other from the safety of their dreary blogs.) I was once on a little panel about some forgettable issue or other and one of the other members was an ambitious and quite accomplished young critic, a guy then under thirty, who complained that poets in America had lost the value of being “judicious and authoritative” in poems. I was taken aback. He struck me as one of those people in college who wears a bow tie and carries a pocket watch—as someone who has gotten overinvested in a certain model of “maturity.” There may be a lot of things wrong with poetry—now and always—but the reluctance to speak with authority doesn’t seem to me to be one of them. In my mind, one of the services poets perform, intuitively, is to hold up the authority of poetic and imaginative tradition against other claims to authority. My suspicion is that the recurrent charge that poets are not sufficiently engaged is typically a symptom of one of two things: the right-wing interest in trivializing poetry and misplaced left-wing guilt. I’m not proposing a Peter Pan model of the poet, but my guess is that “not growing up”—if it constitutes a willingness to remain, as you say, “in mysteries, doubts, and uncertainties”—is much preferable—poetically, ethically, politically—to being prematurely pickled.

So it's this cusp of uncertainty that you somehow find to be both fundamentally poetic and fundamentally ethical?

That cusp—I don’t know, I think the desire to be there must in part be temperamental. I like basketball games that go into overtime; overtime drives some people crazy. I don’t really care about how books or movies end. I like the unresolved. I’ve always been drawn to the moment “before”—the moment when you have a heightened awareness that you’re in the presence of something real, something meaningful, but when the meaning hasn’t yet been captured. To me, that’s the “intensest rendezvous.” In Bob Dylan’s

terms, it's the refrain of "Ballad of a Thin Man": "Because something is happening here, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?" That's one reason that, for me, striving to write precise, deftly rendered imagery—material that conveys much more, through the senses, than can be expressed in other terms—is vital.

But I understand your uncertainty about uncertainty. (Your meta-uncertainty?) It's something that the uncertain ones among us must grapple with. Doesn't it come down to a question of the authenticity of our uncertainty? If uncertainty is a posture—something we adopt in an effort to make cool poems—it would, indeed, be frivolous. But true uncertainty is a beautiful thing. And my guess is that those (like Mister Bow Tie) who adopt the posture of certainty are far more dangerous, morally and politically—and of course artistically—than those who have fewer answers, less of an agenda to promote, and who try to use their work as a way of shedding a little light on the darkness.

My glib, reflexive take on this problem would be that of an aesthete: that the ethical task of a poet is to write as well as he can, as accurately, forthrightly, and courageously—to be as uncompromising as he can in relation to poetic truth. But that is a tall order, an ideal against which one always falls short. Also, of course, excellence is not value neutral: is the ethical task of a nuclear bomb maker to make the best bomb he can? Um, no. But in that case the problem is that the medium itself—nuclear bomb making—is morally corrupted from the start. Whereas I have cast my lot with those who believe that the poetic tradition is, at its height and in its impulse, noble, resistant, and self-scrutinizing. So, yeah, I think the world would be a much better place if we all listened to each other the way poems listen to us.

I do think you've got a point about misplaced left-wing guilt motivating the politicization of poetry today. In fact, one could probably write a whole book

about the hidden role of political guilt in shaping American poetry from Whitman all the way through to the confessional poets. But then again, who except Mister Bow Tie would want to read it?

I'm also mulling over what you said about "the authenticity of our uncertainty," which seems to me like a useful way of thinking about the special kind of knowledge poetry might have to offer. Maybe poetry is where we can weigh our uncertainty, to make sure it's earned and not just an easy way out of (political, emotional, or philosophical) problems. This is pretty abstract, but it leads to the even more abstract question of what secures or grounds that authenticity. I mean, how do we know if somebody is just play-acting their angst or whether it's the real deal? One answer, I think, is the very unabstract answer to be found throughout your poems—namely, embodiment. A person who physically enters into his or her poetry seems to me more vulnerable, more exposed, and therefore more authentically uncertain than somebody who writes from a disembodied perspective. After all, I'm much more likely to believe that somebody falls upon the thorns of life if they actually bleed. This question of embodiment is one that's always struck me as a major concern (conscious or not) in your poems. Peculiar things happen to bodies throughout Debt and Enola Gay—the speaker's head becomes a zipper, a woman breasts are replaced by stone—as if you were desperately trying to bring the human figure into representation, and somehow discovered that the most authentic way to do this might be by wounding, burning, breaking, or otherwise damaging it.

Anyway, we're a long way from babies now, but I did want to ask you about this focus on the human figure, because it seems to me like the body enters into language in a different, maybe gentler way in the new poems: "watched the kneeling girl / twist upward into shape / a stem twined round her / she is out of milk / that flows from her in the song of spring."

I guess we've arrived at the always troubling question concerning authenticity. Well, I have a hard time believing that authenticity doesn't lie near the

root of what many of us—despite having been reared in the strange pieties of postmodernism—really value, whether we are talking about authenticity in poems, or in friendships, relationships, politics, most everything. I do believe, as you're suggesting, that poems provide us with an incomparable medium for discerning authenticity, and for helping to locate and hone the authentic in ourselves. (One of my favorite nuggets from Dickinson: "Microscopes are prudent / In an Emergency.") Maybe this sounds flaky. I'm not talking about absolute truth. I really don't know anyone (in my small circle of intimates) who is a believer in that oh-so-easily-reviled construct. But just because it's easy to make a hash of absolute truth, once one has overheard a few phrases of theory, it seems to me ridiculous to pretend that it's not possible to move toward the genuine, the true—however elusive it is—in ourselves and in poems. And I guess I wonder what we're doing with ourselves if we're not doing that. Of course I'm aware that poems, like everything else made by human beings, are artificial, but I don't believe that excludes poems from approaching authenticity, and partaking of it—as far as I'm concerned, poems routinely do that, and that's a big reason that we read them. One thing that's so moving about poems is that we know they are artificial, but still we invest them, and their materials, with the force of the real. We need to do this, because we need to feel the reality of our lives. When I write the word *tree*, I don't just see a word or construct—I see a physical tree. And if I'm not being particularly lazy as a writer, I'm going to do more to specify the reality, the tree-ness, of that tree—not only as a way of writing a "nice" poem, but of specifying, and thereby sharing in, the reality of reality.

So "*no ideas but in things*"?

It's easy to talk in abstract terms, which always makes me uncomfortable, because I'm drawn to the physical experience of poems, not their ideas. You asked whether, in reading poems, we can begin to distinguish between the appearance of authenticity and something that smacks of the

real deal. Don't you think we rely on being able to make that distinction, however provisionally? I have to believe it can be done. The poem makes a claim—"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my sense," for instance—and, after submerging ourselves in the poem, we can ask, "Do I feel the truth of the claim in the poem, or does it just seem like a convenient or clever thing to say? Does the poem, in its rhythms, syntax, imagery, and so forth, grapple with drowsiness, numbness, and pain, or not? Does the claim feel abstract or, as you say, 'embodied'?"

And how does one embody the experience of one's poem? There must be as many ways as there are authentic poems (i.e., not that many). First off, I suppose, one believes in the reality of one's own imaginative event. One orients oneself to a position inside the poem—one lives in and through the poem, rather than hovering above it, using it as a way to say something that makes one seem clever, or as a vehicle for producing nice poetic effects, which, once you've read enough poems, are not as rare or interesting as they might first appear. I've found, myself, that focusing, in particular, on imagery, has helped me to "feel" the poem by employing my (generally underused) senses, rather than trying to direct the poem with my often enfeebled brain. I've always been puzzled by the relative thinness of imagery in the English poetic tradition, by the way in which sensory experience has tended to get subordinated to rhetoric or theme, for which the imagery is expected merely to offer support. Only with modernism does the situation begin to change, and not in a lasting way. Perhaps because I came to poetry as a way of getting outside my head and its limitations, I've been inclined to enter a poem by drawing some broad strokes of imagery, believing in the provisional physical reality of the image, and then believing that, since it's real, I have to deal with it, explore it, be respectful of it. The function of the image, for me, is not to serve my purposes in the poem, but rather to allow me into the poem, to provide the site for an action to take place. It doesn't mean I'm going to write a good poem. That's not really what I'm after. As my three or four readers may confirm, it's entirely possible

that I may not, personally, have the stuff to write a good poem. But I've still got to try to live as richly as I can.

One artist who comes to mind in hearing you talk about representation and reality is Francis Bacon. Maybe it's simply because of the violence brought to bear on the body in his painting—which, in a way, reminds me of the startling deformations of the human figure in Debt and Enola Gay—but somehow I often think of Bacon's images when I'm reading your poems.

Bacon's work and process are exemplary to me. I love the way he deploys traditional values—of form, structure, line, color, modeling, and subject matter—to explore what he calls his “nervous system.” He also talks, in his interviews with David Sylvester, of using traditional techniques and materials of painting to capture, even trap, the real. Reality is the outcome of his process, not a known quantity that he enters his process wishing to depict. I really think that's why his work seems so alive, so authentic. Then, of course, there is his sheer skill. And his genius. Last year a student gave me Deleuze's book on Bacon. (You can guess who is educating whom in my classes.) I thought Deleuze had some fantastic things to say about Bacon's capacity to produce the sensation of a variety of forces impinging on our bodies. You could tell Deleuze really felt the sensation, himself, in Bacon's work. To me, he was approaching the paintings like a poet (or a painter), allowing the work to overwhelm him. And he suggested beautifully that Bacon's ability to express force in paint was the result of feeling those forces operate on him—that, at his best, Bacon was painting out of his body, and crossing over into the canvas. In that way, I'd say, every Bacon painting is a kind of self-portrait. And of course I believe that to be the case with forceful poems, too.

“Reality is the outcome of his process”—I like that a lot. In fact, what I like most about Bacon's painting—which I don't know well enough to speak about at all, really—is the way it exhibits the trace of its own process. (Somehow the

blurs and smears on his canvases seem to me like a document of perception, or, rather, a document of the process of trying to perceive an unruly subject that won't stay still). One thing that I often think about from those snows of yesteryear at Iowa is your emphasis on process in the classroom. And, though I know you're wary of terms like "ethics" in talking about poetry, it seems to me like there is a strong ethical component to your way of thinking about the writing process, which to a certain degree involves relinquishing control over one's material in favor of a more exploratory or unpremeditated relationship toward one's subject. To my mind, this way of thinking about how to write also opens onto a way of thinking about how to treat other people. But I'm willing to drop my ethical hobbyhorse in favor of looking a bit more deeply into this process question. Could you tell me a bit about how your own process as a writer has developed?

When I started writing, what I was looking for was a way to be wild—to say the things that seemed forbidden (by school, family, girlfriend, etc.) but true. My first poetry teacher, Philip (no relation) Levine, was a great inspiration to me. He told me I could write poems without being polite. So I practiced being blunt and, in my terms, literal. Even if the landscape of my poems was surreal, I was going to treat that landscape as something real and try to be genuinely affected by what went on there. No more metaphor for me. At an extreme, this meant that instead of saying something along the lines of, "I am like a zipper" (i.e., I open and close, I get split and reattached, etc.), I would say, "I am a zipper" and mean it, and try to inhabit that sensibility in the poem. A lot of my first book is composed of poems in the mode of "I do this, I do that, I see this, I touch that." Lots of action, and, as you said earlier, a nasty, sort of punkish aversion to thinking, even a stance of ridicule toward "emotion recollected in tranquility." I thought tranquility was the enemy of poetry—who knows, it might be—and that recollection was a form of fraudulence. I wanted everything to be present tense, and present.

It's hard to imagine now, barely twenty years later, but a lot of my peers found those poems in my first book to be not just daring, but almost incomprehensible, and in violation of the protocols of poetry. Of course, I enjoyed being an enfant terrible for a minute or two. I believed I was participating in a great avant-garde tradition by building my poems on a series of exclusions—expunging anything that might reek of explanation or self-justification, including the syntax of logical connection, and the rationality (A equals B) of metaphor, and the cohesiveness of theme, and the authority of narration, and the consolation of any rhythm that might seemed modulated. Thus did an otherwise well-behaved twenty-five-year-old write a book of poems.

But here's the thing about prematurity: I was ashamed of that book right away. (I would be lying if I didn't admit that, these days, I've made my peace with it and am sort of impressed with its audacity.) Over the next several years, I tried to figure out how to avoid imitating myself and how to avoid writing poems that felt dictated by a stance towards poetry that became stale quickly. I moved to Montana for a teaching job, and two things happened. First, I discovered the natural world; second, I began reading the English poetic tradition in a completely different, less disinterested way—the result, in all honesty, of being required to teach a course in traditional prosody to the writing students each semester. Previously, I had been a single-minded protégé of modernism; but I began to feel—no doubt through a misguided and idiosyncratic reading of the tradition—a deep and personal connection to Shakespeare, Wyatt, Donne, Keats, Hopkins, Dickinson, many others. It struck me that for daring, for density of language and thought, for true modernity, the tradition had a whole lot more to offer than whatever one might find in this month's poetry journals. I began to read the tradition for insights on poetic process and technique.

Gradually, I came to write longer sentences, to use syntax that I had forbidden myself, and, above all from my point of view, to introduce diction that I would have rejected previously as “poetic” or “beautiful.” I wanted something that was located deeper in what I took to be the lyric core of the experience of consciousness, so I made an effort to strip away the scaffolding of story and incident that I used to rely on to get myself into a poem. I moved toward a poem that was distinctly more honed, more crafted, than those in my first book. My other objective was to disallow myself the privileges of the ironist: I didn’t want to use tone as a way of interpreting and narrowing the experience of the poem. So my poems became both more traditional and, I suspect, harder to get a handle on. I also imposed on myself—in reaction to my first book—formal variety. I already knew that my work was not going to develop by artificially changing my subject matter—I really believe that one’s true subject matter is given, not chosen—so I was going to focus, instead, on changing, and improving, my technique.

It does seem to me like there’s a kind of quiet but forceful shift in your process with this new book. Process seems more apparent—more on the surface of the poems—in The Wilds than in your previous collections. This means, on one hand, that the poems feel more raw and less resolved than before. (The endings of the poems, for example, often seem to question or trouble the gestures of literary closure found in many other books of poetry today, or, for that matter, the senses of ending in Debt or Enola Gay.) As you say, this seems to have something to do with grammar—one might think of it as a new grammar of feeling that wasn’t apparent in the earlier collections. And on a technical level, in The Wilds this new process becomes visible through the edgy, peculiar, and utterly unpredictable unfurling of syntax across poetic lines, as in the opening of the poem “Triangle”:

If not for
the triangle accompanying

my newborn to
his father's mother's
scheduled excavation I
would have spilled
him mistakenly down
the banister where
I ought to
belong having squandered
my grip elemental
as my syntax
was.

Reading these poems, I feel like I'm watching the syntax feeling its way toward a destination without any sense of predestination. I know that sounds awfully pretentious, but allow me to adjust my bow tie and elaborate. It's like the grammar unfolds—in real time—a sense of what the poem is. Does that even come close to making any sense? And if it does, I was wondering if you might be willing to talk about the role of syntax in the process of composing a poem like "Triangle," and how this process differs from your earlier methods of composition. And for extra credit, could you say something about the role of lineation in staging the grammar of the poem as it was written?

After *Enola Gay*, the process of working out the next stage of poetry for myself once again took several years, and lots of trial and error—more error, certainly, than success. As you say, the major shift in the poems in *The Wilds* involves, finally, the relationship to syntax. I don't know why or how it happened. Maybe it's because I had started writing so much prose over the years, and I am perpetually frustrated by prose's demand that we say one thing at a time, one thing after another, when what our bodies really want to do, I think, is to experience conflicting states simultaneously. It may be, as you say, that the process in these newer poems is more exposed—I certainly hope that's so—but on the other hand, this process

is rarely referred to, as it was in my first book. In the poem “Triangle” that you mention, I suppose the most basic way in which process is invoked is that each line is composed of three words—a triangular, and always shifting, syntactical fragment, connected to those surrounding it. It seemed interesting to me to measure a line based on the quantity of words—trying, somehow, to have something happen in each trio of words—rather than on the basis of rhythmic stresses or counted syllables: I thought there might be a lot of possibilities for variation within the sameness of each line’s measure. But to be honest, that decision didn’t emerge until I was well into writing a draft of the poem and was chiseling away at it. I believe, surely, that I had in the back of my mind an old favorite poem, the “Little Triangle” series by Vasko Popa, but I also know that at the time I was trying to figure out a way to write entire poems in a single sentence (a very different shape from that of the closed geometry of a triangle) and was exploring how far I might be able to stretch the materials of a sentence and still keep the sentence intact. In the interest of full, self-contradictory disclosure, I should tell you that the months in which I was making this single-sentence effort were those that involved the build-up to the war in Iraq, and the beginning of that war, and in my mind the desire to keep speaking without interruption felt somehow connected—in conflicted ways—to the politics of that moment. A few of those one-sentence poems survive in my book, but some became collections of fragments that sort of drift into and collide with each other, and others simply start and stop without syntactical boundaries. “Triangle” is one of the more tight-assed poems in the book.

So what is the “triangle” that’s being referred to in the poem?

We started out by talking about my forthcoming trinity, didn’t we? One likes to think that in every pairing there lingers a third, unarticulated term. It would be easy to assign it an identity—the Third Party, the Other, the Alternate, and so on. But when I wrote that poem I think—I

know—I had in mind a walk I took with Emily on a dirt road through woods in Maine, passing a beautiful salt marsh before going over a hill and dropping to a secluded beach—and I had the image of the two of us walking with a triangle around us, around our waists, like a big belt, if that makes sense. Of my 435 favorite lines in “The Waste Land,” my most favorite might be, “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” That third term, in this poem, is the point outside our pair who makes of our pair a triangle, and it is the triangle itself, which includes us, and is invisible to us but present, and points both to ground and to sky, past and future, and which is a real thing to us—a being, a shape, something we made in the course of our walk, something like a poem. In that way the poem is entirely autobiographical, as all my poems are these days, autobiographical and also full of made-up stuff.

JAUNT TO VERMILION

Christopher Murray

Went there. Was frisked. Found
in the dirt the leg-bone of an elder.
Sent it home. Rinsed my feet
with wine. Imbided a glass of sky
on a wrought-iron balcony in the rain.
Recited a psalm-outtake. Shook a maraca
filled with teeth. Bit a lime. Arrived
on time for the execution of a bad
idea. Faked a slow blues at a weathered
piano on the back of a truck racing
south toward Jackson. Cashed my chips
in. Ducked the taxman. Axed the flaxen
trunk of a birch which I stacked before
the fire that warmed my hands chilled
by the Arctic winds ushered in by
El Niño. Ate a lamb. Ran toward the Tropic
of Cancer. Planted a chip in my hand
to monitor my blood before the next election.
Sought protection. Was rejected. Found
I was nevertheless protected by the fact
that nothing matters in the whole scheme
of Nature with its West Winds and its
clattering ash-boughs soon crusted
with ice. Was stabbed twice. Laughed then
at the corrupt ceiling in a Demerol dream
and followed an elk to a shale-strewn
precipice. Was dictated to by an
untraceable voice. Made a choice. Chose
a jaunt to the red horizon right on time.

ON IMMIGRATION

Prageeta Sharma

After being humiliated one continues the manuscript of identity.
The activities, the diseases, the doldrums, the crony affair after the
situation,
the one where one faces how one is the undertaste,
how one isn't the neighbor the piebaker, a white folk. How one isn't a
gorgeous dream
wrapped up in tireless affection, primed for wider screens.
So there one grew, in the coffee sickness, the dictionary browsing
in a fury for the word entitlement to spill—
After convulsing with rage, one continues the aftermath
of no friends on Tuesdays or shouting fiercely when nothing sobered
to the eleventh hour and the tide shrunk to its sense of privacy where it
had nothing to do with shores or moons, and humiliation sat on its
lover's
knee, greeting the eccentric rich and the hourglass with such force
the rage enameled like fine paint to the sheen of deep blue.
Restless in the way that stirs the crowd to its feet, to claim the
encounter
for the intentions of personal gain without the empire, without the
embarrassment of
shaking one's head, of resting it underneath the ground, to live
sanctioned in the migrancy
with an ugly plate to the economy but working ever so hard. So
unplanned, so beyond
what one did before the lack of dignity sang an opera. And organized
all the ideas, before
rage shot a bird that once watched effortlessly all the comings and
goings.

THE OTHER DALE

After Ashbery's "The Other Cindy"

The other Dale is an unnamed cat, different only in the way graphic design is different. Different in the way a cat is always childless but the other Dale is not. His ascendancy greatly modifies the loyal, gentle fur on the most careful paws. What eastern horizon on the ledge of simple astounding greatness, of a silent perch towards the Brooklyn

Bridge,

this other Dale writes novels in wayward meows, swoons parking over the children playing, what similarities draw a man to the cat, is it the kitten in a personality? This poem is laughable with mock serious but the

other Dale loves mock seriousness, which one is flying through the air of appearances,

both in a counterculture alley, hence making an imitation of the other Dale, feigned but

unpretended, with adoration brimming in coffee cups or branches of the intelligence

services lapping kitty milk all over the corporation.

EIGHTH STATE

Evan Willner

Then there's the issue of the maypole bodies that pull
us throat tight through our daily turns, turning in day
for day, strung up standing by pulleys and branches
grounded in bone and contracted by hard pulses
and turning through the rotten and slow open mouth
neighborhoods we know we know that squat wood hard in
mud too old to name. Tied by fascia to our back
yard trees and husbands and groceries and watching
our jerky turning neighbors, we've got to take care:
our muscle leash could tangle, bringing us up
short or bumping us together to produce new
bodies jerked in other tight and turning circles.

FIFTIETH STATE

When our cities have settled into their concrete old
man clay foundations, having been given hard in
to the continent until it healed over them,
and thick generations of us have filled the sky
scrapers' numbered columns, and even our offspring
colonies are stuffed to bursting, then surely some
throwaway one of us will touch down on new earth
finchy and all business, or else Americans
made redundant will slip their Mayflowers up soft
core beaches somewhere else. So you can rest easy:
as long as our crawling bodies still fuck on, dig
black and smother this skin, we'll have our somewhere else.

DREAM IN WHICH I AM ALLOWED 12 ITEMS

Kate Hall

let me keep this shell and
line it with mucus
hung over the abalone walls
let me call abalone a house and
let it only count as one thing
count the grit to
keep me company please
allow me company let me have
sand and stone and let it only
count as one thing count a mouth
and fingernails count
days and nights as one thing
let me have a clock so I will know
when it's time let there be enough
space even as the shell snaps shut
like an overloaded purse let me keep
the tools I have saved
needle-nosed pliers, severed
bird wing, cat-gut sutures let them *be*
tools let tools count as one thing
count a spoon and scale allow me
matches to devour the hardwood floor
let me lie there
allow me antiseptic but blind me
and take away the furniture
let me not wonder let me know

only twelve things the rest
let me wreck myself

INTERNATIONAL QUILT MUSEUM, LINCOLN, NE: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, 2004

Vito Acconci

Think of the site as a layer, a layer of land, over which another layer, a layer of building, is applied. Think of this layer of building as a patchwork—the building divided into, or made up of, a set of buildings, a cluster of buildings, a mosaic of buildings . . .

Yes, we are thinking of a building as a quilt. But not a building covered by a quilt, not a building overlaid by quilts. Think, instead, of the quilt as a model for building. Think of a building that's structured *as* a quilt. Think of a building whose surface is separated into threads, think of the threads of surface intertwining and interweaving to make the building's structure . . .

We're thinking of quilt, so let's think from above, let's think in plan. A set of buildings as multishaped planes, adjacent planes, colliding planes, intersecting planes. From above, we see the planes break the rectangle, some planes pushing out, some planes pulling in, a plane swerving off and out on the bias, on a diagonal. It's a plane of loose ends, the edge is jagged, the perimeter jogs . . .

A quilt is two-dimensional, yes, but a quilt is tangible, a quilt has texture, a quilt has thickness, thicknesses, one thickness next to another different thickness. . . . Let's stand aside then and look at our plane of buildings from the side: it's a multilevel plateau, a plane of rises and falls, like the skyline of a city—one box, one building, jutting up which the next one

squeezes down. The quilt is soft: our plane of buildings is a layer of not of boxes but of bumps, heaps, swellings, and bulges . . .

Come inside our blanket now, walk through the filling between the layers. What appears as a cluster of buildings outside is a cluster of rooms inside; the exterior of each building, each bump, shapes the interior, and vice versa. It's as if, on the layer of land that makes the site, a layer of buildings is applied in two directions, down and up. Underground is the mirror image of the buildings above: this is the storage. Above the ground, each building is a different-sized office, a conference room, a research library, an auditorium, different kinds of exhibition spaces. A different kind of exhibition room, for example, for each different kind of quilt; where kinds are related, the rooms blend together, the separations melt. These exhibition rooms are as fluid as fabric: a floor curves up to become a wall, while a wall curves down to become a floor—a large quilt displayed there sweeps up from floor to ceiling—it's close enough to step on, to touch, and at the same time, far enough away to get a distance from it, to analyze it . . .

These rooms, these bumps, inside, that are shaped by the buildings, the bumps, outside: as we design them, let's think of the quilt as an American form—a product made by Americans who came from elsewhere. Let's think of our building, inside and outside, as a multitude of elsewheres: a mix of nationalities, a mix of histories, a mix of biases. Our building should be a collision, a patchwork, a crazy quilt, of opposites.

But we're jumping too far ahead of ourselves here, we're straying too far afield. In the meantime, let's stick to the ground we're on: in the meantime, let's think of buildings as a mix of architecture and landscape—let's think of buildings that *become* the landscape, and landscape that becomes buildings—let's think of buildings as a carpet, a mat, a quilt . . .

THE HIGH LINE, NEW YORK, NY: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, 2004

Picture a park ahead of you, as you walk west on Twenty-fourth Street, say: it's a park in the air, a park in the distance, a park of the future. Now you do a double take: a tree in the distance is moving—slowly, slowly—from south to north, as another tree behind it moves just as slowly from north to south. Between the static buildings on either side of the block, this park in the distance is a crisscross of moving greenery, there's movement across the sky.

This vision of the High Line is a changing one, it changes as I write. The park is a moving platform that loops at each end. It's slow enough that you can enter, you walk from a stationary access point, above a street corner, onto a moving field. You walk with the moving field, or against it, you make your own movement in relation to its movement.

Can the High Line—should the High line—be a moving park? We don't know yet. But this notion of movement stays in the back of our minds as we start to think of the High Line's future. We don't have to preserve the look of the High line, but we want to preserve its history as an event, a circulation route. If we don't, if we can't, make the park move actually, we can make it move virtually.

(What the movement shouldn't do is make change in the park unnecessary. Rather, it should be like this: as you move through a vehicle, a magic carpet, that circulates past the nodes of buildings, you move through a magic carpet with different sectors, different districts, you move through a changing space that itself moves.)

This High Line park, up in the air, is a spaceship, a long linear space ship, a space city. Its ground is fluid, its walls—if there are walls—are fluid. Its space should confuse, wind together, inside and outside.

It's the park for the day, of course, but it's also a park for the night: in the park, the virtual space that the night allows joins with the real space the park borders. The High Line becomes a greenhouse, a greenhouse for plantings but also a greenhouse for virtual plantings, a greenhouse for projections, a greenhouse for tests of a possible future.

Picture, as you walk west on Nineteenth Street now—picture the High Line as a twist in the sky, a winding in the sky, a braid in the sky, between buildings. At a street corner, you enter a bubble, you walk up this bubble, or the bubble lifts you up, into the park. It's a park, but it's also a spaceship. It's green, but it's also plastic that weaves and bulges and shrinks and warps: it's a park where you can walk and progress from point to point, from changing scene to changing scene, but it's also a park that wraps around itself, and wraps around you.

Picture the park at night. Not a night of nightlife but a night of dreams—better, a night of nighttime stars. You should be floating in this park: in the middle of this spaceship park, you're in a tiny spaceship, a personal spaceship, you become a spaceship, yourself. The park is a public space, but you can enter a capsule, a transparent bubble, you float through the park and above the park. It's you: you're the spaceship that's seen from below by a passerby who walks down the street. It's you-in-a-capsule that joins with another capsule, another person-in-a-capsule, a private space in the middle of a public space, a virtual space in the middle of a private space.

CONFLUENCE PARK, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, 2001

Picture off in the distance an aggregate of bumps, a heap of bulges, a set of peaks, a mountain range. But wait: these aren't mountains so much as pyramids, their structure is rigid, they're person-made, they're distinctly *built*. It's a cluster of pyramids, like the accumulation of multisized buildings that make up a city skyline. A ten-story pyramid, say, is flanked by a three-story pyramid, that's overlapped by a six-story pyramid. These pyramids, these make-believe mountains, disappear, almost, into thin air; you can see right through them: they're the bare bones of mountains, the skeletons of buildings—they're the steel structure within buildings, they're the structure without the skin.

These triangulated structures support a system of spirals, spiraling ramps, that twist up through each other, and under and over each other, into the sky. There's a spiral of water: ideally this half-tube is transparent—the water gushes, rushes down in thin air, like a reverse tornado. There's a spiral of trees: a line of trees climbs the mountain—it's as if the act of climbing is there, the trees are there, but the mountain has disappeared behind them. There's a spiral of mirrors, like a spiraling linear roof: the topside of this line of roof brings down the sky, the clouds, the sun from above—the underside brings up the landscape from below. There's a spiral of light: lines of light intertwine in and out of the other spirals—the light is mixed with electronic images, the images run up into the sky and down again, like a movie in space, a movie that longs for outer space—the bare bones of the mountain becomes a virtual mountain.

Come closer now. There's another spiral, and this one's for you: a ramp of grating that takes you through mid-air and in and out of the other spirals. The spiral takes you inside each pyramid. Whereas the outside of the pyramid is a circulation route, the inside is a node, a node in mid-air, a park that hangs in mid-air.

So now you're in the middle of this confluence of elements. A flow of water twists around you; now and then the water gushes, the water spurts; the water that winds down around one pyramid suddenly goes in the opposite direction—it gushes up, it spurts up in an arc that arches over onto and into another pyramid. The lines of trees move, the trees rise slow up the mountain and then back down again, like an excruciatingly slow roller-coaster. The running lights and sliding images intertwine with hard facts, implacable like stone, and make an atmosphere of unreality around them.

Inside the pyramid, it's as if you've dug a tunnel through a mountain—it's as if you've gone through a hole in the earth—it's as if you've reached the hollow earth, the hollow that runs through the middle of the earth.

HALLEY II RESEARCH STATION, ANTARCTICA: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, 2004

Come into the dark. We can't see anything, we've never been to Antarctica, there's nothing to remember. Slip inside an Antarctica of the mind. In the dark, we lie back and sleep, we dream of Antarctica. But then we pinch ourselves and we know we're not dreaming; we *are* seeing something after all, we're seeing all there is to see. It's dark here, one-sixth of the year, it's almost dark another third of the year. So let's build a building of light: it could be a bundle of light, loops of light—or it could be points of light, the ends of extending tubes of light, like periscopes of light. When a plane comes in, these lights guide the landing. But nobody comes here much; those lights won't be necessary most of the time. Think of the building as a landing field: not for planes really, but for information—information from the skies comes down to land here, information can be pulled down from the stars. We don't need light to watch the skies; let's build a building that turns on and off—the lights turn off, and we disappear into nothingness as we watch the lights of the sky.

But your eyes get used to the dark after a while, and the land here is white. The world here is a sheet of ice; it's too white, too bright, to sleep. Think of this world as a white sheet of paper, a blank page. Get past dreaming and doodling; we can use that page to make fictions on, for one thing, and to make calculations on, for another.

So let's start again. Come out in the snow, come out and play in the snow—not snow really, but snow-after-the-snowfall, snow as the hard implacable fact of ice. Surf the ice, slide and glide over the ice. The building-on-stilts is dead—there's no need for telescoping supports, no need for the

building to rise over the ice as the ice accumulates; long live the building that rides the ice, long live the building that floats. Let's build a building that is a balloon, a balloon that is a building. Let's build a building that rolls with the punches. It's a balloon-within-a-balloon, a sphere-within-a-sphere; as the outer sphere turns and shifts while rolling over the ice, the inner sphere remains stable, horizontal. Now that we've gotten the building rolling, there's no stopping it: the building splits like an atom, the building floats out of itself, the building separates into a complex of buildings—let's build a city of balloons. Sometimes the balloons roll apart from each other, like space capsules, like personal spaces; for passage between them, a tubular bridge telescopes, stretches, from one to the other—let's build a city of molecules. Sometimes the balloons come together, bump into each other like ships in the night; each balloon is a shape-shifter, one swells while the other shrinks: when the breaking point is reached, each balloon breaks to make passage between them—let's build a city that lives like a virus. Let the virus combat the health of the ice.

(Step back for a moment and survey what we have from afar: in the dark, on the snow, we're building balloon buildings lit from within—when one balloon building melds, for the time being, with the other, the colored lights of one swirl through the colored lights of the other, and vice versa. What level of impact is required? How much energy is spent? Think, analyze, diagram, calculate . . .)

But we're getting woozy; our skin is numb, our muscles and joints are numb, our minds are numb—it's too cold to think here. Let's begin again. Brave the cold, come outside into the cold. Let's build a complex of buildings that have skin like an animal. Since these skins will be manufactured, and made of plastic or carbon fiber, there can be a fur that's braided and knotted, to stop the wind—a sealskin that's pleated, folded, corrugated, to divert the wind—a reptile skin that's flexible, pliable enough to be pushed in and pulled out to trap the wind, repel the wind. Let's build a building

that wraps around itself—a building that swallows itself—a building that turns inside out of itself. Fixed within frost, in the face of the wind, we go into the buildings and live as if, in the middle of a raging ocean, we were inside the belly of a whale.

(The building is like a glow inside a mountain, a secret world inside the mountain, undetected from the outside. Each room is a different kind of light, a different color of light; it's the light that makes the room, shapes the room—the room doesn't need walls to separate itself, it's the light that separates the room. We walk from room to room, from hard light to soft light, from still light to variable light, from one color into another. Once our work is done for the day, we have some time to relax. The light is composed of images; just as, with audio speakers surrounding us, we can be in the middle of music, we can be here in the middle of a movie, a movie that's as palpable as the air we breathe, a movie that *is* the air we breathe. Instead of being entertained, we have entertainment slipped under our skin, instilled into our bones. The air here is heated in such a way that we can float in the air, like the floating building we're inside of. In the middle of Antarctica, Antarctica floats out of itself for a while, away from us, and leaves us in a world-in-itself, that becomes a world of our own.)

OUR HEROES ARE NOT IMPRESSED WITH YOUR TABLE

Seth Abramson

At the end of the reel the glories
fade into paper-cuts, the sallies into half-lit copses
cease (advisedly), the forays which circle
the chuckwagon peter out, battlefield mortgages
are renewed at an ever higher rate,

I let somebody screw me
out of a decent roundhouse.

I also let somebody plug my nostrils with tin coins
and drain the ditches of our living,
I let adversaries spill their medals into our
poker games, and finally—finally—nobody famous
gets laid (in public), but who's to remember?

What I mean is
two men escape from their island prison,
the hero's knuckles go bald enough to pretty
the myth, and the myth goes black as the chase
where the dogs are all dead and

the humors of a shorthanded victory have soured—

why is it the best stories of courage are so wicked?
If mine seem to falter, it is only because you can
see the phalluses, and the bastard living
are the bastard dead, the guns misfire into regattas,
the orphaned children decide to go
to college, anyway.

SHARE OF VOICE

Andrew Maxwell

Those who caution against allegory
Will never know the story of a small town
Or have never known a small town with a story in it
Or the risk of starting out that way
Docked in at a child's height, learning the weight
Of a lesson in the yards, learning to wait
For that one thing you have to do there, then
The daybreak in the locker room, the classic
Of menace, where there's gallantry nonetheless
Among the boys, and a bachelor infrastructure
To systematically draw blood from a generic pump
Into the extremities, though the towel stinks continuously
It's the broad courage of a method allows you
Your wild talents and the risk of being specific aside
The feint of cold weather and a conventional smile
Like an earnest Pupkin in average daylight
Or a spoonbender disproved on the late show
Who learns the necessity of uncommon pursuits
Is part of learning the books, and the experiment
Perilous, and the costume experimental
But the reward American as a sidewise pitch, casual
Language adopting success before exertion
In small packages, as though they might grow
Allegorical themselves, these turns of phrase
That define an uneven miracle, what was
Literature before literature comes rich and vague
Stumbling into small towns like a hunter
On sabbatical, the right warren to rage in

Without the risk of injury, to turn the page
In the morning, clean as a washing powder, endorsed
By a fiction of sunlight, true and proud
To be over the heads of the quiet nationals
Who, like Diogenes, came to “debase the coinage”
And became the face of a voice too principled to speak
To our local audience.

THE CLEARINGHOUSE

We begin with the argument, I think after all—
and knowing what we do is clearly about seeing
things through to an end, it's an ecological rout.

This Daniel Boone business is about played out,
Greeley had it, down his path. It's rurality, being
so slender, headed inward, that makes a noise about
“after-comers,” with their trains and garden dreams
soundless beyond the pleased past. It seems
a puzzle, especially, with every cruelty in store.

Remember the Rohmer film about the mayor
and his mind all in the mediatheque, an ambition
astride the view? Like a mower, a manly mission,
and viewed by so many, politicians or nomads
caught in a green patch, self-saying, a “scene.”

We don't know what they mean. Their
vaunted pique is an antidote to poetry, and even
the Binsley Poplars were replanted. Beware,
that fount of Locality is undersold by what we saw
to plan, even-handed, like Horaces taking account.

Your cargo of pardons will have no market—
It is unfashionable to look at them—Even
speculation is at an end. That's needling Paine,

yet is that true, with the British at an end, and
our prick just beginning? Beginning to end,
fragrantly we think, like a country must too.

DISCLOSURES

I saw a face in the crowd.

Can I say I was pleased? Will I say I was pleased to be
there, anywhere seeing a face? Something unsettled
remains. It's not particularly distinguished.

Poet or coward, the structural ambiguity obtains. The pique
of the crowd at its peak asks for that
action exceptional
or ideal ecumenical

but no departure that
maligns the scheduled off-world
that farms our remains.

With such success in markets, these long-felt but unsolved
needs, and of course with the failure of others
will the language be renewed
by some novelty?

A crumpet blower.
a clover picker,
the kid who hits the ball with a bat.

Our hero, at that. Or hero, hatcheck.

Said Sportsman, peel thyself: a stand-in
for the pratfall factorial—

behind the panel of poetry, a gunroom and a pianistic theme.

Called to be “worldly,” so he seems. The defect
of the national becomes proverbial, a hard-on
for rhyme so distributive and systematic
despite what it kills and stands up, comic.

The comic is no exception, like crowd to glue.

No matter how the audience is distributed, it's best to not take shape
too soon.

A frozen expression is the best we stand-ins can do, silver harlequins in
the light
of anything, candid or historic—

Do we defer to music too often, to become lovers on parade?
Or be not afraid of peeping mot
the furnace, with its livers
on the burnside.

I deride only the crowd. Will it deride mine? Will it look at how my face
is made?

It looks askew. It fills up still again.

I have a number of things in mind. I recall Baudelaire, who says:
Intoxication is a number. I note it as the bottle tips towards the surface.

Who is Baudelaire again? So many terrified when he comes to town.

The exception is always terrible, and the coward is no exception.

THE CONTINENT BEHIND THE COLLEGE

Lesle Lewis

A SOIREE AT THE SANITARIUM

A mother is killed on the highway, her fawn hovering over her body. By philosophy's time we're counted broke.

My cat is a rolling prime number on hot brick. The bricks wobble, convalesce, and hallucinate. The sanitarium has theme and piano, a tour about, and special beverage experiments.

We pray for the gift of longer life sentences. On the continent behind the college, many boys and girls lie resting.

THE DARK EYE

We're good ninety percent of the time. We look work right in its dark eye.

The continent behind the college is spreading. It's not nonsense; it's Friday. An artist unhangs his show.

How the cracks between rocks and bricks fill with thyme, text and pots with sun, a television mutters, a mood shutters.

When you sit opposite from me at the café, I see what's behind you and you see what's behind me. Perhaps we should have been planning for this spontaneous conversation.

THE NEW ENGLAND THINKERS

Don't rush my sitting under the finch book tree. It has been dark for ten days and like two eyes feed one brain, we go driving. We are on an expedition to see the big numbers and wreckage of the floods.

We are in a clock shop.

OVENBIRD

Jonathan Skinner

golden-crowned paruline, adored pizpita
señorita of the mountains
I too might have caught you
gliding through the Guatemalan
deciduous woods, by swampside
or with your bill turning over leaves
more than one of us turns our black-
bordered orange streak to
shades your triangular thrush-spots
with raised wings, see you us
aural capillary ringing call
tea-cher TEA-cher TEA-CHER
seldom seen but heard, gentle
to boys and girls, few get inside
your white eye ring, touch your pink
legs, enter your little dutch oven
to feed on bugs, worms, slugs
I have heard you in the mulberry patch
teacher teaCHER TEACHER
and followed through the shade
all a spring eve, your marginal
attentions never thought a sparrow
would suddenly turn to me
my chant, his chant, my chant
growing louder you sink ME
in the ground among dry leaves
decayed moss, grass-lined
teach TEACH TEACHer
& part my tapered wings

TO ASH

Mary Jo Bang

The dustpan of dirt bits is near over.
Bring me a broom. A broom
Is bright. We can't stop remembering
Pleasure, can we? The escape

Through the plate glass to the green grass
Of the other side. No more.
Which is what done means.
Has always meant.

The pain is—and now make your own list. It's this
And it's that. Tsunami and suicide. Please
Takes its mate
And together they make Please and Thank you.

And someone takes that text and attaches it
To blue board, acid-free and lasting.
And there you have it, a life
That makes you forget for the moment

This is your one and only
Mechanically insistent pulse. Otherwise,
Every circle is turned to looking up
And every crossing over is

An endless plain of remembering
That the overcast sky is merely the secondary drama
On the screen at the back of the mind, and far
From the real eye's vigilant watch

For a reliable means of distraction.
If only an actor could stand in for the self
Nothing bad would happen.

GOODBYE IS ANOTHER WORD FOR NOT

Imagine the movie
With its seen scene. It's 5:15
And what's left of life.
That realization is a real formula

For reluctance.
The sun is still an egg yoke
Lemon rim around a rectangle
Window shade. Everybody's

Subject is sitting in his or her seat.
A bonfire of burnt-orange burns
At the bottom of the screen.
It's fall, so

It's the bonfire of exquisite trees
With russet leaves.
Minnie's white-gloved hand reaches
Out to touch

A leaf leafletting down.
And in that, evidence of
The bitter coil's poor Mistress of
Unceasing Seasons. Someone says,

What day is it? No one answers.
The cold beauty in the middle
Section of the seats,
Her smile clothes-pinned up

Pretty-girl-like, smiles
Out as the character, perfection acting
For all of us, says,
At the end of the day,

The sun always goes away.
She is lying
On the edge of nothing,
Outside, an orange light

On the top of a cab is something.
Nothing less than incandescence
(Flicker). That bright
And that almost

Over. And then, we see the evil
Denouement: as the movie apparatus
Matches the luminaire taxi light,
Making them both disappear.

How sad is absence. How very gone
The nothing after.

TIN MAN

Jericho Brown

In my chest	a slit of air.	Don't say love.
Drop a penny.	I can't feel a thing.	Remember
Cities shine gray.	Never believe	the color green.
No green is god.	I've watched color die.	I've killed it.
And every tree must fall,	slicing the air.	In my chest
A missing beat.	Skip it—	Hush, love.
Man made me.	Add a little oil,	drop one penny,
Pull the lever:	I chop.	Men made me
So I stop.	I am tired	of your woods,
Your whole world	unpaved, green.	Cities shine
The color gray.	Don't you want	something heartless?
Can I get you	An axehandle	for destruction?
Tired of your body?	Use mine.	Manhandle,
Beat time—	I won't feel	one damn thing.

ROBERT

A shame.

I couldn't place the joy
Turning a white boy

Red. Somewhere deep
Inside him I'd hear,
Belly of the whale.

I worried about bruises,
My brown burning the red
Permanent, how I'd look

Left on a Bob, betrayals
Doubling. What if

I hurt myself? God,
Dam the entire ocean.

No one can hear a drum
Beat from the belly of a whale.

A VAGUE PICTURE

Danielle Dutton

There was a letter written as a kind of crazy joke, it was a sort of contest, a contest. It was easily stirred. I left the bowl on the counter and the bugs found it. "You're filthy," it said.

A SOLID TRUTH TO IT

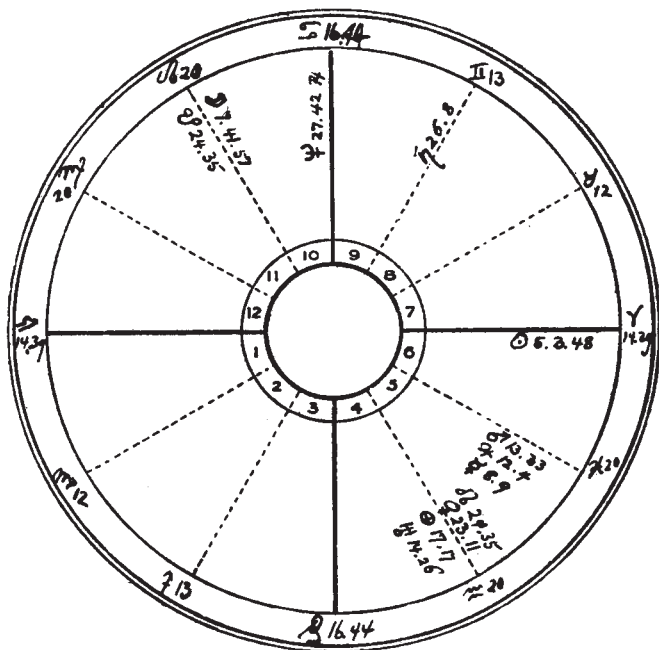
On days my skirt rebounds from my head. I walk the concrete in a performance to be included, along the sidewalks for inclusion into furnished apartments like boxes of plastic marigolds. This participates in my nearsightedness in interesting ways. It depersonalizes things and little strips of time. I aim metaphorically in one direction but wind up on the opposite side of a parking lot.

"ORPHEU."

26 March 1915 at 7 p.m.

1.º número vendido.

Range: 7.12.34.



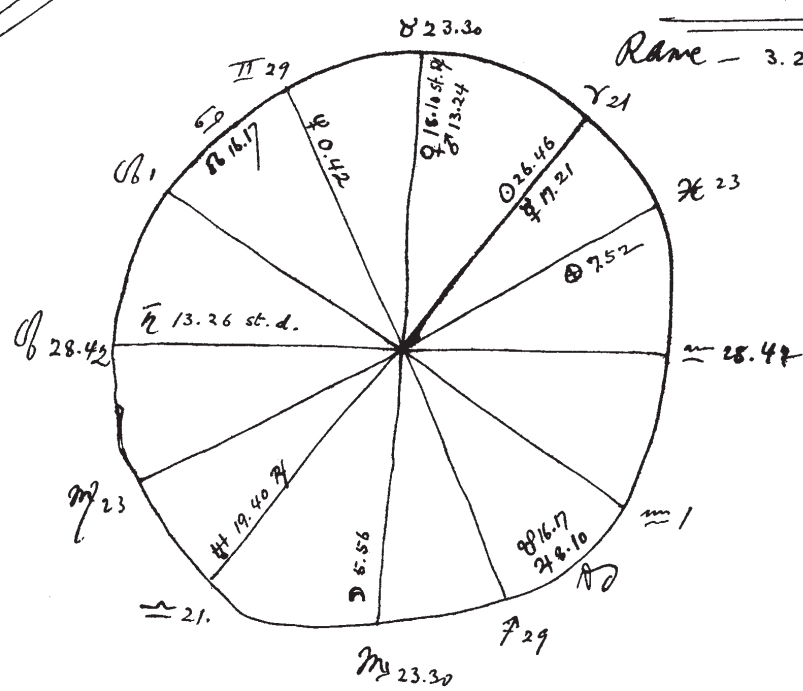
1.22 2.22 p.m.

Caeris

16. April 1889, at 1.45 p.m.

Leifva.

Rdve - 3.24.35



1915 comp. 5 12 man.

Juan r. 16 - pro 0 5 ♀ (m. m. c.)

Regulus is in 28.38

ca. 6 ex.

pro. 24 ex. pro. 6 death.

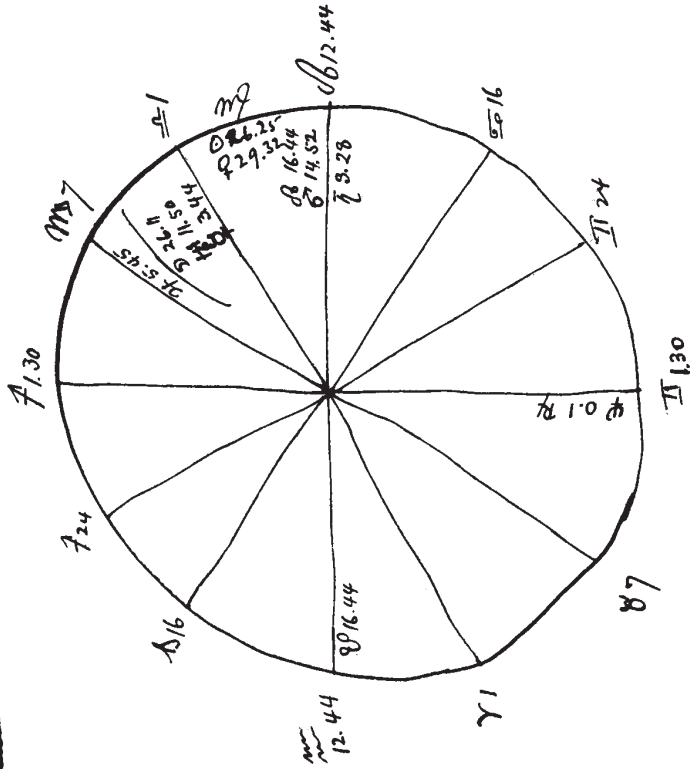
Montes sub conjunctis in elevation! (in g. th.)

19 Settembre 1887
di 405 larda Liban.

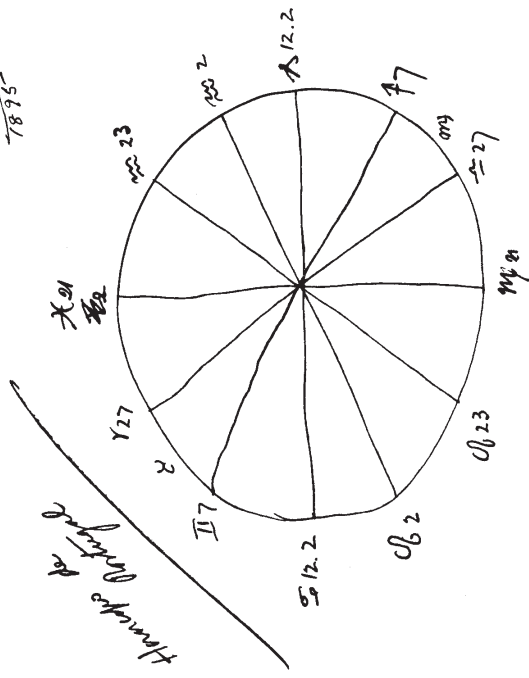
4 5:40

plants for 4.45" very approx.

no offense. Learn



914
19
1895-



4° transit de. from Sept 1906 to July 1908
the 4° 41' was angular.

Jan. 1, 1800.	Grav	Ossera	
1820	7 13	08 23	21.49
1840	7 13	09 30 55	1260
1860	7 13	10 14 49	45
1880	7 14	10 28 44	1309
1920	7 14	10 40 29	109
			45
			21.49
			10.55
			5.27
			21
			5.07

1897 - 3rd transit M.C.
1903 - 1897 10.55 hours.
1897 } mini 1897 4 to 1897.
1908 }

Regidius - transit de 7 polo M.C.
Rev. 5 mts - off. de 4. 4° de Rev. para a 7a casa.
14 mts - transit de 4 polo M.C.
31 juneis - transit de 7 polo M.C.
Desde Set 1906 a Julho 1908 4° transit a 7a casa.
Desde Março 1907 a Set 1912 4° transit a 7a casa.

SUGARBOTTOM SONG

Michael Snediker

Today is the day of the hunt.

Sloughing my cheeks with moss
and fastening my bracelets,

I thought maybe
it was the day of love,
it felt like spring.

In that spirit, I'd snapped
certain peduncles
for their sap, which I dabbled all over—

pale acorn of my belly,
twigs of my limbs, as far
as I could reach of my back. The sap

was to make my body
stick, so when I rolled in the mortar,

the pollen would stick
and I would shine.

I was a stain.

I was pink, and they pinked me.



Today is the day of the hunt.

This didn't involve bears.
Or birds. This didn't involve

the mantises, morning dripping
repellent from their yoga poses.

Didn't involve the dung-bugs,
tho it usually did. Today they were
scot-free, maybe it was their day of love,

day of dunging in the steamy mounds they made
for such occasions.

Didn't involve saying, or pebbles
stashed in backpacks.

There weren't backpacks,
Sugarbottom does not sew pockets
to his bottom, then or ever,

pockets giving impressions
of a certain use-value, where there is none.

~::~~

Today is the day of the hunt.

I left my snailshell, pink as a blushing bride.

Pink as a blush;
pink as weal, and pink as welt.

I thought, look up,
and sure enough there were hands everywhere,

not quite open, and not quite closed.

The fingers both bent and stretched
without pointing.

These were not fingers for pointing,
let alone holding. These were fingers

that had just let something go.

THE LINGERING SENSE OF EDAL

Jon Link

edal babcock poured salt on her own wounds, she wanted to see the teeth of christ, to know if they glistened like pale people's eyes do when they die. she was a saint in the way that people never see, carving gothic architectures into corn husks. in the wool of her separate second mind she was carrying the tusks of a very large ghost. no one asks about that. no one wonders to edal, how is your second mind, or are those tusks heavy—do you know what kind of ghost they come from. that would miss the point anyway, it wasn't the complexity of burden that made edal sort choirs, it was that she could bare something and remain in classical motion. one day it could be a panda's eyelash caught in her throat, and still edal would not hesitate to clasp the hand of even a very stupid girl. no one knows what it is that is inevitable, but there is an awareness that some things gesture with their own slow motors, it was edal's sense of this that propagated her frictions. the most inanimate of timings stretches down to touch her and it's in these moments she can taste the wooly oil and see the sparkle of an almost hungry ghost willing at last to touch her.

KILLER INSTINCT

Erica Ehrenberg

To feel with your tongue a man's teeth
is to experience like a visiting spirit
another body. All day I thought
such smooth white parts were prone
to fall out. I lay my hand
on his naked back and it was hot!
I thought, this is too much for me,
this body, its mystery: you never know
what it might do. And what if
it's not human at all but a mechanical
invention? I put my hand on what I thought
might be the engine, and sure enough,
it hummed.

ROOM KIT

Here in this box is a kit
to make a bedroom
but it fits inside my hat
and doubles as a light bulb
in its collapsed form.
It has been assembled
under water, just off the coast,
but those who take it apart
find it's never the same room twice.
I put a bed in it, linen, spun
long as a spine, but slack,
in a kind of spool.
And when I unpacked
in a nice green place, it was gone.
You will hardly believe I decided next
to collapse with it, or that I came out
as though I'd never touched you.

ENTRY FORBIDDEN

Deborah Golub

*[Selections from the International Mail Manual, "Country
Conditions for Mailing," May 2005, U.S. Postal Service]*

ALBANIA

Extravagant clothes and other articles contrary to Albanians' taste.
Items sent by political emigres.

ALGERIA

Funeral urns.
Saccharine.

AZERBAIJAN

Cutting and stabbing arms, knuckledusters, stiletto blades, balls of
paralyzing fluid.
Antlers, and the horns of the species *Cervidae*.

BAHAMAS

Radioactive materials.
Skimmed milk in tins.

BANGLADESH

Quinine, colored pink.

BELARUS

Metallized yarn made with or made of gold thread.

Opium.

BOTSWANA

Honey and preparations of honey including royal jelly, preserves
sweetened with honey, and flypaper.

Prison-made goods.

BRAZIL

Cigarettes, cigarillos, cigars.

Umbrellas, or any other articles containing swords, daggers, or guns.

Primary educational books not written in Portuguese.

BULGARIA

"Musical" cards (cards that play a sound recording when opened).

BURMA (MYANMAR)

All goods manufactured outside Her Majesty's dominions and bearing
the British Royal Arms or imitations thereof; or bearing as a mark
or label a portrait of any member of the Royal Family of England.

Toy pistols.

CANADA

An issue of a publication that contains an advertisement primarily
directed to a Canadian market is a prohibited import if that

advertisement does not appear in identical form in all editions of the issue distributed in the country of origin.
Secondhand hives.

COSTA RICA

Dual-graduation feeding bottles.

DENMARK

Almanacs (except for single copies) that do not bear the university almanac stamp.
Fine-cut tobacco in small packages to which cigarette papers are attached.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Books addressed to bookshops in care of banking institutions.

ECUADOR

All maps showing the territory of Ecuador with incorrect boundaries.
So-called "Panama" hats.
Bits and mouthpieces made of copper.

GERMANY

Absinthe.
Articles bearing political or religious notations on the address side.
Melatonin.
Playing cards, except in complete decks properly wrapped.
Pulverized coca beans.

GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Horror comics and matrices.

GUATEMALA

Gardenia plants and seeds.

Police whistles.

GUYANA

Bees.

ICELAND

Sausages.

Toys made of lead.

INDIA

Arms and military equipment, except for the Indian government.

IRAN

Fashion newspapers.

IRAQ

Binoculars.

IRELAND (EIRE)

Peat moss litter except under license.

ITALY

Artificial flowers.

Bells.

Bonnets.

Chloroform.

Hair.

Leeches.

Ribbons for typewriters.

ISRAEL

Games of chance.

Soil and sand.

JORDAN

Advertisements concerning treatment of venereal diseases or medicinal preparations intended to serve as preventatives against those diseases.

KAZAKHSTAN

Deer hooves.

Nuclear materials.

LEBANON

Artificial butters.

LESOTHO

Eau de cologne.

Military uniforms.
Printed matter relating to football pools.

LIECHTENSTEIN

Mini-spies (miniature wireless transmitters).

LUXEMBOURG

Postcards embellished with fabrics, embroidery, spangles, except in
sealed envelopes.

MALAWI

Aphrodisiacs.
Correspondence concerning fortune telling.

MALAYSIA

Harpoons.

MALDIVES

Gunpowder.
Weapons of war.
Intoxicants.
Poisons.
Nitrates.
Pork.
Statues used for worship.
Pornographic material.

PAKISTAN

Arms, ammunition except when sent on behalf of the government.

PANAMA

Pastries.

PARAGUAY

Tomato juices.

Socks except those made of jersey.

PERU

Underwear.

Communist propaganda.

Contraceptive products.

Dolls.

Waxes and creams for shoes.

SAN MARINO

Albums of any kind (of photographs, postcards, postage stamps, etc.).

ST. LUCIA

Shaving brushes made in Japan.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC (SLOVAKIA)

Chain letter items.

Sheets of music, etc., contrary to the State public order.

SRI LANKA

Volleyballs.

VATICAN CITY

Human remains.

Live animals.

VIETNAM

Invisible ink, codes, ciphers, symbols or other types of secret
correspondence, and shorthand notes.

Used mosquito nets.

OPERATIONS

Rae Armantrout

This child fights cancer
with the help
of her celebrity fan club,

says,

"Now I know how hard it is
to be a movie star."

~::~~

"Hey,
my avatar's not working!"

~::~~

This small hawk on a wire
above tangled flowers.

~::~~

Speech, too, was thought
to be inhabited
by a god.

Then hunger
invented light.

BIRTH ORDER

I

You're it.

It is (you are)
an error

with an arsenal
of disguises,

with a system
of incorporation
built in,

with enmity,

with direction.

2

What have you got to lose?

This
gray tile roof,

gray sky scored
by power lines.

This framed measure
of distance
as intimacy.

Shadows of fingers
(mine)
move across the white page.

Anyone
could write this.

That word—
“this”—

firstborn,
unnecessary

IN THE BOOK OF NOTHING

John Gallaher

In the severance, we have no names.
Maybe they forget to whisper.
While it is merely, and watching ourselves.
At the funerals of very small coffins, how much pain is there?
And who decides?
She hit her head and fell.
Now we're afterward, in the little book of guesses.
And what I might deserve.
And in what economy.
Snowed up cars float down the street, with our donations and experts.
It's how the lonely find the phone.
It's this tingling sensation when I came across him in his office, weeping.
There at the outline of the door, it's the old story calling to check in.
To see how we're doing.
I'm doing crosswords.
I'm counting by ones.
It's just something the body does, like drowning.
When I was hoping for something else.
Something benign perhaps, like socks, where all we'd say would be
photographs of spring houses.
This's all wrong, but so many things are wrong.
With this coffin a single man can carry.

STUNG

Charles Freeland

In a field, a blind woman sits beneath an apple tree. Grubb sees her at first from a distance. He thinks she must be meditating because she doesn't move. The woman picks an apple off the ground and takes a bite. There is a sound in the field of insects buzzing, and as Grubb approaches, the sound gets louder. Soon, he sees that the apples on the ground are covered with hornets and he hesitates because he doesn't like getting stung. He thinks hornets are like intelligent people, capable of reading his thoughts. They know when he is confused and they take advantage. But the woman waves him closer. She says, don't worry, they are all so drunk as to be harmless. The woman's hair is dark and she wears a sweater that accentuates her breasts. Grubb wonders if she knows he's looking at her breasts, staring and fantasizing openly. He wouldn't have the courage to be so blatant if she could see, and perhaps this tells her what he's up to. Grubb sits down a few feet away. He realizes, in fact, she's right—the hornets are drunk on the fermenting apples. They stagger here and there across the skins. The pulp of the apples is frequently exposed and turning brown in the sun, and the hornets get lost in there. Some of them seem to have drowned. The woman picks another apple off the ground and brings it to her mouth without wiping any of the hornets away. She says, they can't hurt you. In fact, they make you see. Grubb doubts the truth of this, though, because the woman grimaces each time she takes a bite, each time she swallows. Grubb suspects it is a trap, that the blind woman is smarter than he is and something terrible will happen. All the same, he reaches for an apple and gets stung on the end of his thumb. The woman takes his hand, puts Grubb's thumb in her mouth. He sees a road, then, stretching away in the distance. He sees the sun going down behind some trees.

FRESH OUT OF SQUAB

The inmates wander around in the rain. They seem to be looking for something in particular. Their eyeglasses, maybe. A treasure map. Grubb thinks someone must have left the back door open. He stands at the fence and watches them move about in their white and yellow robes. A handful spot Grubb and head in his direction, pausing along the way to whisper among themselves. The hospital stands on top of a hill, its windows barred and only very few of them lit. The oldest man wants to know if Grubb has any liquor, if he has seen the wild goats that frequent this place. The man's beard is white and he picks at his teeth with his finger. Grubb hasn't seen any wild goats, but just on the other side of the river, there is a woman who stands naked in the front window of her house. That's a lie, says one of the inmates who gathers his robe more closely around his neck. He explains why no woman would stand naked in the window of her house, and his argument relies on an elaborate geometry. Just then, someone rings a bell on the back porch of the hospital and everyone shambles off in that direction. Grubb asks the inmate with the white beard what they're having, and he thinks the man says goat, but he's too far away to be sure. Grubb hurries back down the road to the bridge and across the river. The woman is still in the window. A dozen children have gathered in front of the woman's house, and they make room for Grubb only reluctantly. He motions to the woman from outside, says, put on your robe, I have an idea. But she acts now as if Grubb isn't even there, as if he has become invisible. The woman brushes her hair. She sits on the couch and reads a book.

[SHIVER; SHIVA; SHIV]

Robert Strong

Shiver; Shiva; Shiv: eighteen-wheeler. Should this life suffice, I speak I shall not return. I will undo me with helpful momentum from the universe. I will be sawdust scattered from the subdivision construction site that is this earth & spectral plane. So be it. If this life should not suffice, I ask, what is the criteria? What contingencies for extra time? My life is like a little language, the only thing listening, even the speaker. I have thought my audience. I thought my audience might have Higher Powers. Like Posterity. Like Airplanes. I thought that, spiritually, acute attention was a waste of time, a mindset. I thought scattered fragmentation more akin to a million eyes, and the exhaustion it engenders, godlike. Call me old school, but extremities are centering. It's not about getting reconciled before you die, it's about being behind the wheel and knowing every moment the truck comes. And being mostly ok with that.

THE ASHBERY BRIDGE

POETRY AND PUBLIC SPACE



Eric Lorberer

photographs by Kelly Everding



Author's Note: The following is an edited version of a talk with accompanying visuals given at the conference "Some Trees in a Forest of Possibility," a celebration of five decades of John Ashbery's poetry held in April 2006 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. It is humbly dedicated to John Ashbery. While space does not allow for all the photographic and video imagery I used to be re-presented here, it is my hope that the reader will still find a useful engagement with the bridge via this abbreviated written version.

I want to take you on a tour of the Ashbery Bridge, which is the largest public artwork in Minneapolis, and I think one of the finest pieces of public art in the world. I'd like to present it both in terms of Ashbery's poetics, and in how magnificently it imagines a role for poetry in the public sphere.

I should say at the outset that the bridge is not actually called "the Ashbery Bridge," though it is affectionately referred to that way by poets and many others in the Twin Cities because of the site-specific text piece John Ashbery was commissioned to write for it. A bit oddly, it is rarely signified by its sculptor/architect creator, Siah Armajani, and almost never (in common parlance, at least) by its technically accurate name, the Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge, which honors the arts patron who helped fund it. To my mind, however, it is a sign of the total artwork's success that so many viewers connect it with the poem by John Ashbery that adorns it.



Fortunately, it also supplants in the public consciousness the other bridge in Minneapolis connected with a poet, albeit accidentally: the Washington Avenue Bridge on the University of Minnesota campus from which John Berryman leapt in 1972, taking his life. An utterly workmanlike structure unimaginatively decorated with the University's logo, this bridge—although of course not intended to be an art object—is still something of an affront to the Mississippi River that flows beneath it. In this it stands in marked contrast to Armajani's innovative structure, which I think radically improves the river of traffic below it and is worthy of being associated with poetry.

I'm going to dwell for a bit on Armajani's great achievement in this work, for it provides not only some useful background but also a hint at what the poem will bring. Armajani is highly regarded as both a sculptor and an architect, and is an active proponent of public art. Born in Iran but naturalized as a U.S. citizen, he is enamored of America and democracy, and has repeatedly stated that he wants to create art that "relates to human



purpose” and that provides settings for community and interaction. He is particularly obsessed with gazebos, plazas, reading rooms, and especially bridges. In 1996 Armajani received the commission to create the Olympic Cauldron for the Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta, and, not surprisingly, he couldn’t resist incorporating a 190-foot bridge extending from the stadium into the design. He loves poetry and often incorporates it into his work—in addition to Ashbery he has used works by American poets ranging from Herman Melville and Wallace Stevens to Barrett Watten and Marjorie Welish, and his most recent public art project is called the Floating Poetry Room, which apparently drifts on a barge around the canals of Amsterdam.

While Armajani is justly acclaimed for many works, to my mind the Ashbery Bridge is one of his finest accomplishments, bringing all the elements of form and thought into exquisite alignment. It functions fully as a pedestrian bridge, allowing amblers passage over sixteen lanes of traffic, yet it is anything but pedestrian in its design. Significantly it joins two



public spaces: to the west, the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, which contains works by Calder, Lipschitz, Dan Graham, Ellsworth Kelly, Jenny Holzer, Louise Bourgeois, Claes Oldenberg, and many others; and to the east, Loring Park, which provides the downtown cluster just above it a splendid and necessary retreat.

You might note that these two spaces the bridge connects represent the art world and the polis; importantly, the bridge was created jointly by these two worlds. For those of us who want art recognized as part of civic life, that is cause for some joy. It never ceases to amaze me that here is a massive sculpture which was actually put together by the local Transportation Authority. The finished piece is both utilitarian *and* symbolic, both art object—at 375 feet it is the largest sculpture ever commissioned by the Walker Art Center—and (at those same 375 feet) a practical conveyance for the city's denizens.

I'd also like to mention the bridge's design, which ingeniously incorporates the three fundamental kinds of bridge structures. I read this as



an attempt by Armajani to create a kind of ur-bridge, to rhapsodize about the very *idea* of a bridge. The core structure is a steel truss design, and you can see in these images the crossbeams of the truss in both blue and yellow repeating across the whole horizontal of the bridge. The history of this form is also nicely alluded to by the through-lines of both the fir plank floor and the dark green rails that offer an unobtrusive stability for the bridge's users. Yet Armajani also dramatically employs the form of the suspension bridge—you see it starting here in the yellow western portion and swooping down—and the form of the arch bridge in the eastern blue portion beyond that. The result is a triumphantly overdesigned space that evokes classical architecture, late nineteenth-century industrial structure, and postmodernism all at once. It's here you begin to see that no other poet but Ashbery could create text for such a project.

The collision of these forms creates a majestic enterprise. The two catenary arcs overlap at the bridge's center and metaphorically join the two worlds I discussed earlier. Also, it's significant that they are reverse

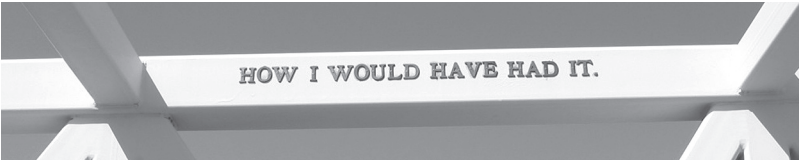
images of each other, creating a slightly askew mirror effect the bridge plays with throughout, and that Ashbery's poem will powerfully deploy as well. Finally, note how deftly Armajani has used color, choosing the highly recessive tones of light blue for the arch side of the bridge and pale yellow (which Armajani has said was inspired by Jefferson's Monticello) for the suspension side. These atmospheric shades evoke sun and sky, and invite the natural world to participate in the material nature of the bridge; they also obviously underscore the sense of transition from one side to the other, creating an off-kilter symmetry that highlights the double dream which is at the heart of this project.



With all this in mind, let us rise to the poem's invitation. Because this poem is meant to be physically encountered, I hope you will indulge my desire that this might in some small way recreate the experience of actually being on the bridge, so please: take a deep breath. Imagine your pulse quickening as you climb these many wooden steps. The air feels different as you ascend, the sound hollower as the traffic turns into a droning roar beneath, the wind definitely stronger. Take another deep breath as you reach the landing, and look up:



AND NOW I CANNOT REMEMBER



HOW I WOULD HAVE HAD IT.



IT IS NOT A CONDUIT (CONFLUENCE?)





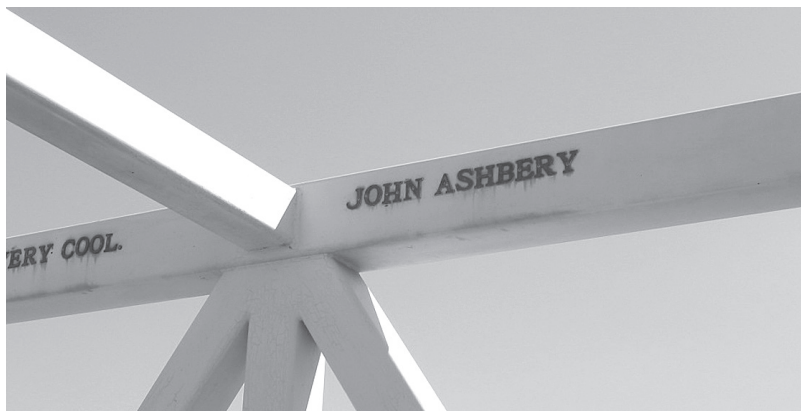












Like so much of Ashbery's work, this poem constructs for us a world made out of pieces of the present moment, which is a very hard thing to do—but before we look more closely at the poem, I want to dwell for a minute on how dynamically the bridge incorporates the lines that so impressively complete it. Most poetry which appears on public display tends to duplicate the paradigm of the page: we needn't look farther than Loring Park (adjacent to the bridge) and its gazebo, also designed by Armajani, for an example. Here, passages from Eliot's *Four Quartets* are placed on stands around a public sitting space; they provide a kind of grace note, but their presence hardly offers the reader a new way to encounter poetry. For the attentive reader, the passages Armajani has chosen do collude nicely with the sense of contemplation the Ashbery Bridge offers, although it has always seemed strange to me that he didn't include the opening of "The Dry Salvages"—as in describing the river as "only a problem confronting the builder of bridges," it virtually describes Armajani's mission statement.





In contrast to his rather sedate inclusion of Eliot's poetry at the gazebo, Armajani's presentation of Ashbery's poetry on the bridge is revolutionary. Stringing the text along the bridge's upper lintel, the sculptor forces us off the paradigm of the page, encouraging a new and vastly more experiential relationship to the act of reading. This heightened experience extends even to the materiality of the poem's words: rather than attempting to inscribe them upon his structure in some way, he has cast each letter of the poem in bronze and

riveted them to the metal, thus making them fully part of the sculpture. They even wear in the weather, quite beautifully I think, along with the bridge itself.

Now, we know from its inclusion in *Hotel Lautreamont* that Ashbery gave this text to Armajani as a prose poem, allowing the sculptor considerable freedom in how to place it. Armajani deftly took advantage of the latitude to enhance the reading experience. As you've seen, the bridge uses beams and spacing to suggest caesura, exploding the convention of line breaks while simultaneously evoking their rhythmic power; occasionally the beams also obstruct the upcoming text, propelling us forward and encouraging the ineluctable pleasure of discovery. Furthermore, the

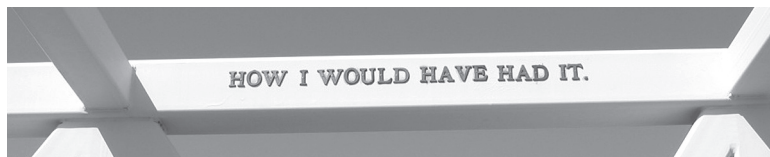


design creates natural breaks, allowing the reader to take the poem in at a meditative pace, and crucially, the full text appears on both sides of the bridge, so no matter on which side of the bridge you begin, the reader experiences the poem in its entirety. In all these ways the sculptor has offered us a highly innovative public setting for poetry, and Ashbery has risen to the occasion with a poem that reflects this grand fluidity.

Let's take a closer look at how it works, noticing first that this poem has no title, an extremely rare occurrence in the Ashbery oeuvre. This is a poet who is so gifted with titles that in his 1993 collaboration with Jane Hammond he supplied the artist with a list of forty unique titles for paintings she then created. The lack of a title on the bridge, however, is absolutely necessary, as a title would announce its status as a poem—and for this poem to do its work in the public space, it must not be commodified, dismissed, contextualized, or prepared for. Also, the lack of a title enhances the effect of the *in medias res* opening, which is paradoxically as elegant as an opening as can be:



Ashbery loves to begin poems *in medias res*; in fact, he pokes a bit of fun at himself in the poem “Unreleased Movie,” the first line of which reads “Let’s start in the middle, as usual.” It’s interesting that a significant number of his titles even begin with “And”: the beautiful barcarole “And You Know” from *Some Trees*; the justly celebrated “And *Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name”; the long masterpiece “And the Stars Were Shining”; and the recent prose poem “And Counting,” to name just a few. Likewise there are scores of poems that use the beloved conjunction as the initial word, and the book-length poem *Flow Chart* relies heavily on “and” to continually restart itself. The technique underscores Ashbery’s radical treatment of the present moment, to be sure, but here on the bridge I think it also does something a bit unusual. In most of his poetry, Ashbery tends to use the *in medias res* opening with an extreme certainty of tone, plunging the reader into a specific narrative moment—you can look at the openings of “Fuckin’ Sarcophagi” (“And when they had mounted it on the flatbed, / the dogfish requested a commuter’s ticket”) or “Morning Jitters” (“And the storm reestablished itself / As a hole in the sheet of time . . .”) for examples of this. The bridge poem, however, begins with an interior, contemplative, highly abstract imbroglio of tense, a knot of temporal confusion that in its very syntax asserts a bemused situation of *not* knowing, and one that’s multilayered at that—





—not only can't the speaker "remember," but what they can't remember is in the imagined future, a desire.

But what is it a desire for?

Although Ashbery generously positions for us an initial first-person speaker, creating a kind of situational empathy, the object of this sentence—and I think the true subject of the poem—is "it," which is repeated eight times over the course of the poem (nine if you count the beautifully buried echo in "conduit"). Now we all know of Ashbery's fondness for this pronoun, but I'd like to remind you how carefully and intensively he uses the word.

In this, Ashbery builds upon a process begun by the Romantic poets, who were convinced that the outside world was intimately connected to one's perception and description of it. Spelunking in the caves of phenomenology, the Romantics began to push the boundaries of what linguists refer to as *deixis*—expressions that require personal, temporal, or spatial context for adequate interpretation. One way they did this was by complicating deictic words such as "it." You can see this development by looking at poetry written prior to the Romantics, in which the information contained in deictic words is never really a problem. In Shakespeare, for example, "it" always refers to a clearly defined antecedent—read Sonnet 116, for example, and you'll see "it" quite clearly standing in for "Love." Yet by the dawn of the nineteenth century, Coleridge would begin his magnum opus with a strikingly bizarre line, "It is an ancient mariner," convoluting the convention of pronominal order and thus sense. Although we know the colloquial meaning of such a narrative beginning, we might also attend to its odd phraseology, and if we do so, I think, we speed more quickly to the heart of that poem's subject.

Since the Romantics, a number of poets have explored the nuances of deixis, but Ashbery undertakes the inquiry with a vengeance. He virtually

flays the topic in the tour de force he so understatedly calls *Three Poems*; in fact, if you go back and look at the famous opening of “The New Spirit,” you’ll see that he actually both states and solves the problem on the very first page—

I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way.
And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would
be another, and truer way.

clean-washed sea

The flowers were.

These are examples of leaving out. But, forget as we will, something soon comes to stand in their place. Not the truth, perhaps, but—yourself. It is you who made this, therefore you are true. But the truth has passed on

to divide all.

—the statement reverberating in the first sentence, and the solution occurring so pointedly after the dash: “yourself. It is you.” Fascinated with the endless pleasures of deixis, Ashbery goes on to elaborate the question of what we mean by “it” throughout *Three Poems*—first in “The System,” where we find this terrific, almost tongue-in-cheek moment of self-reflection:

Suddenly you realize that you have been talking for a long time without listening to yourself: you must have said *it* a long way back without knowing it, for everything in the room has fallen back into its familiar place . . .

—and later in “The Recital”:

It always presents itself as the turning point, the bridge leading from prudence to “a timorous capacity,” in Wordsworth’s phrase, but the bridge is a Bridge of Sighs the next moment . . .

In this passage, it’s interesting to note that Ashbery figures “it” as a bridge that changes from one moment to the next, an idea he expands in a wonderful poem from *Houseboat Days*, “Wet Casements”:

I shall use my anger to build a bridge like that
Of Avignon, on which people may dance for the feeling
Of dancing on a bridge. I shall at last see my complete face
Reflected not in the water but in the worn stone floor of my
bridge.

Ashbery further develops his thinking about bridges in the poem he composes for Armajani. Building on the beautifully complicated use of deixis in the opening lines, he begins to help us out with what “it” might be by using the logic of negation to suggest that “it” is the very physical structure on which we’re walking:



I love how he immediately controverts the conventional notion of a bridge as a mere thoroughfare—and how the momentary confusion about its description is also rewarding, as it continues the process the opening lines had begun of creating a voice whose lack of grounding we can take for our own, while at the same time slyly reminding us that the gathering rivers of traffic below (a confluence) are literally what occasion the purpose of the bridge, if not its meaning. The latter lies in what the user of the bridge can bring to the process, replacing the transit function with mere being: “a place.”



Having thus defined it, he sets out to balance it, seeing within the chaos of movement that the bridge presupposes the fractal truth of order. Like his great precursor Wallace Stevens, Ashbery knows that our ideas of order cannot be separated from we who make them.

Such a symbiosis is archetypal, of course, but the bridge also wants us to take note of our present surroundings; from this particular angle some of us might find its ability to frame the scene in relation to

the poem especially resonant—as again in the next line, where the ever-new Walker Art Center in the background comes into view:



The words “tail end” might also remind us of the cars below, whose movement we constantly sense on the periphery. It’s a doubleness Ashbery instantly reinforces—



—deftly connecting the activity the bridge literally overcomes (and we constantly witness between its lines) with our inner life. Also, notice he broadens the speaker's voice from first person singular to plural, now able to speak for the body politic for whom this bridge exists. And importantly, the physicality of "driving" becomes a directive to speak our minds—in fact all Ashbery poems do this well, but here it's an activity not limited to the poet and in fact encouraged in the reader. I'm reminded of the insight that leaps out of Ashbery's essay on David Schubert in *Other Traditions*, when he says that "the ideal situation for the poet is to have the reader speak the poem" (somewhat echoing Mallarmé's wish to offer readers "the delicious joy that arises when they believe that their own minds are creating"). And this is exactly the astonishing thing Ashbery has done here—he has given whomever crosses this bridge a poem that gives voice to their experience *as it unfolds*. I can say for certain that Ashbery's "ideal situation" happens frequently on the bridge: as opposed to the demure decorum of mutely listening to a poem in performance or receiving its transmission from the page, on the bridge readers practically converse with the poem, emote out loud, engage. Both Ashbery and Armajani have imagined the public space of the bridge poem as allowing for this demotic discourse, and have intermingled life with art, transition with stillness, noise with silence, and so on, to achieve it.

The next line, containing the poem's sole concrete image, is another place where the demotic is known to flourish:



but physically too—with the wind in our face and our gaze seduced by the horizon, it really *is* so much like a beach, that transitional place where according to Stevens the earth arranges itself between the safety of order and the constant cry of the unknown. Ashbery winningly responds to/contends with context in even more fundamental terms:



The poem refers here to the reader's physical presence on the bridge. To read the poem, we have to walk and stand, stop and start, which helps induce a proprioceptive consciousness, realizing more profoundly than any other poem I know Charles Olson's idea that a poetics could be developed around "the DEPTH implicit in physical being—built in space-time specifics, and moving (by movement of its own)." Ashbery achieves this here, and more: note how the introduction of the second person helps the line read not only as a momentary existential crisis but also as a jibe at any impatient reader who might be inclined to give up on the task at hand. Either way, Ashbery takes this crisis and dissolves it: fully assured now, the poem offers a definitive take on the matter, inserting a central sentence that begins with that key word "And"—



—to encourage our embrace of the limit of the deixis of here and now. We can only exist in the present, but the poem tells us that's okay, and it does so in the simplest of terms: "it is good." I'm reminded of the glorious first line of the title poem of *Some Trees*—"These are amazing: each"—and I think it's the quiet revolution of that line, its discovery of music in even the plainest of statements, and the worlds of complexity contained in its simplicity, that is so worth celebrating.

Back to the bridge poem, Ashbery swiftly mirrors the concrete simile of the beach with this beautifully abstract simile,



yoking our intellectual faculty to both the whimsy of fate and the kindness of fairy tale endings. There's a nice doubleness in "picks you up," alluding to both physical space or movement, and a positive mood or state of mind. In this central portion, the poem remains in the second person, speaking directly to its reader in the most intimate of terms; see also how it takes our definition of the bridge from the opening—"a place"—and turns it into a verb, another skewed mirror moment which instructs us that we are a part of where we are.



I love too how the grand timbre of these lines is echoed and encouraged by the convergence of vectors and colors that Armajani is calling forth, and how the classic iambic diction of “to be” resolves into the startling spondee of



literally arresting us in our path. For any reader who hasn’t figured it out yet, here is where they’ll realize that they’ve been reading about themselves, that they’ve become a living example of the theory Ashbery so famously put forward at the end of “Paradoxes and Oxymorons”: “The poem is you.”

We’re approaching the center of the bridge now—you can see the green vertical support coming into play—and the half-rhyme of “far” and “fair” continues to meld the figurative and literal passage into one:



Look at how lovely and almost Elizabethan that line is, calling the bridge and our act of crossing it (which we know now to be one and the same) “fair,” which can mean both pleasant and just. And see how time reinserts itself into the bargain of experience,



our future catching up with our present participle to create the past. Visually, too, Armajani dramatically echoes Ashbery’s figure of chiasmus by placing it at the center of the bridge both ways across; on the northern side you see these lines dramatically broken by the green vertical, while on the southern exposure the break occurs just before that moment—again suggesting that this work wants to revise pure symmetry into something stranger and far better.





So this is how the poet would have had it: at ease, able to conclude that the infinite present is enough, free of desire for what lies on the other side of the mirror to agree. With such conclusion, he is able to extol the bridge with the ultimate deictic phrase:



and recognize how simple and elegant are its true materials:



which seem to refer to both the bridge's intricate design and, in a gorgeous metonymy, to the strength and breath of the human user who completes it—a nice reminder that “I” and “it” are yoked in this poem, that what we’re calling “the bridge” is always already our proprioceptive passage across the bridge. It’s for this reason that Ashbery, with an almost Hopkins-esque turn of phrase, recognizes the bridge, as he did in “The Recital,” as paradoxically not rigid in form,



and with “mottled” picks up on the lovely patchwork of clouds the sky often provides the viewer. And all of this leads to this mini-catalogue’s wondrous end:



In stating how fortunate we are, this line not only echoes the tenor of the poem’s realization that we are the bridge but places it in a suspended double state: are we lucky because we have a panacea or because it’s small? Either way, the near oxymoron of “small panacea” provides a delightful *frisson*. It’s also brilliant that in a poem constructed predominantly of simple Anglo-Saxon words, the surprising use of the Greek-derived *panacea* in the penultimate line to say what “it” *is* should be stated with such assurance—as opposed to the moment, back in the second sentence, when the drive to say what “it” is *not* led to a momentary stumble over the Latinate terminology of “conduit (confluence?).” Finally, I want to praise this line for its sheer music, for here we’ll find another kind of mirroring effect. Like a scale masterfully inserted in a composition, like a zipper opening and closing, like a boomerang of language coming back, this ten-syllable line tumbles out in dactyls but ends on an extra stressed foot, making its resolve certain and creating, if we want to have some visual fun, a perfectly symmetrical bridge of its prosody:

' - - ' - - ' - - '

The mirror effects of this penultimate line are indeed great, but they are only a preamble to the poem's perfect finish:



Having reached the other end of the bridge—not the end, remember, but the other end, which the fact that the poem can be read from either direction makes clear—Ashbery rewrites his opening gambit, places us again *in medias res*, but with some key changes: “And now” has become “And then,” narratively heralding conclusion and resolution; no longer needing the mask of the first person singular to ease us into the poem, “And now I” has become “And then it,” the true subject of the poem; and rather than the indeterminacy with which we began, “And now I cannot remember,” we have the strong closure of definite occurrence, as the poem suddenly, wrenchingly, beautifully places the entire present tense meditation in the past. Eliot famously asserted this dynamic in *Four Quartets*, “In my end is my beginning.” But Ashbery actually enacts this in the bridge poem, illustrating how our ever present state of *in medias res* can be experienced as a position of fortune rather than crisis. In Ashbery’s work, we’ll have the experience and get the meaning.

Most chillingly, however, the last line of the bridge poem not only serves as a rethought mirror to the first, but contains its own doubleness, returning us to the physical world of sensation—and this is a crucial return, a reminder that while we’ve been in our heads, the world has swirled on around us—and simultaneously confirming the



poem's positivity via "very cool," a slang which asserts that even after the flourishes of apotheosis contained in the previous lines, the best is yet to come. Having traversed the place of movement and order and having found ourselves in the passage, we're able perpetually to begin again, to reenter the continuing story of our present with some hope.

This move—Ashbery's amazing ability to recognize that not only heightened language but all language contains such flux, is present from the very beginning. We see the exact same dynamic in the title of *Some Trees*, which is at once totally flat (i.e., an indeterminate number of trees, certain trees and not other trees) and pointedly colloquial, as in "those are some trees!" Deploying this doubleness in his poetry over the last fifty years, Ashbery has been our quantum poet, proving again and again that the shifting surface of plain language is just as capable of calling on the necessary angel as the more bardic rhetoric normally associated with poetry



(a rhetoric amply served by the other great debut collection published in 1956, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*.)

Let us leave the bridge and rest awhile, on a park bench in the sculpture garden. I like to sit here because it's near the foot of the Ashbery Bridge, and also because it directly faces a wonderful statue by Barry Flanagan—which to me, much like John Ashbery's poem, stakes a claim in favor of the present moment, albeit perhaps more whimsically. On one particular hot summer afternoon, my paramour and I were resting here after seeing some new art exhibit at the Walker, when a young man, (probably a student) and an older woman (probably his visiting mother or aunt) stopped directly in front of us and began to talk. It was one of those fantastic moments when you feel that somehow the world is putting on a play just for you. "What shall we do now?" the woman asked. "We should totally check out this bridge," the man said, pointing up. "It's interesting because it's got these words on it, and they kind of . . . go together."



On that day and on many since, I've thought that's not the worst definition of poetry I've ever heard—and it's especially not such a bad foothold for poetry that seeks to matter in the public space. In realizing the power of this possibility, the Ashbery Bridge joins the rest of the poet's work as our polestar, our shining exemplar.

I WAS ONCE VERY SMART

Dorothea Lasky

For my mother

When you said I was smart, you probably meant
I was a philosopher.

Stopping the car and thinking, too, does not necessarily
Mean you're smart, but it probably does.

Being smart means your mind has
Been whipped by the large whisk of God.

Now your brain sits on your head
And you can see most things.

The injustices themselves are obvious.
For instance, it is tears that drench your face.

It is animal jaw that is shot down and eaten.
It is child that is killed, too, and wept.

When the stars shoot out
It is my heart that listens

The sun like a fog
And all that is real like a bitter silence.

The face of the universe, wet and sucking in air.

EMOTIONS

The flat balloon
Wraps around the child's face.

This is how it feels when you talk to me,
I can't get out of it and you say very little.

My hands are holding
The balloon tightly on the child's face.

I want the child to feel life.
I want to feel

The pain that the clouds have made for me.
Suddenly the child springs up, gets me a present, and says thank you.

His dog follows after him
And the dog is made of snow and so am I.

MY LANGUAGE AND I

Ilse Aichinger

My language is one that tends toward foreign words. I choose them, I retrieve them from far away. But it is a small language. It doesn't reach far. All around, all around me, always all around and so forth. We advance against our will. To hell with us, I sometimes say to it. It turns, it doesn't answer, it lets us happen. Sometimes customs officers appear. Your passports? We pass, they let us pass. My language didn't say anything, but I did, I nodded obligingly, I made them happy. One, and something around him, unsuspecting. But what was it? A coiled spring. No, smoke. There is something around everyone, don't you know this? The poor boys, I honestly feel sorry for them. Yes, honestly. Now you're babbling. What is it about them that makes you feel sorry? What makes you feel sorry? Young and nothing else, what should one feel sorry about? This develops, inevitably. Strengthens and becomes extremely large. While we're stuck in the ink slaving away, slaving more and more, thereby pretending to be pleased. And thereby lose the pleasure. Honestly. Who is the one saying this? I. This makes me laugh. This reminds me of the one who said I when he wanted to come inside the house too late. I am outside, I, I. Of him I am reminded, but what was his job? Caretaker, I believe, yes, caretaker. Are you hungry? I am. But I have such a habit of always omitting one hunger. First one, then two, then three. But then I'm telling you there comes a meal. Then nothing stays away, then everything is on the table, everything before me. Then they cavort around, all around me, then I have it. Sleepy? Well then sleep, go ahead and sleep. I'll look for you.

So this is where I sit with my language, only three meters from those who talk like that. But we are through, we have passed, we can settle down if we're out of breath. Plenty of deserted spots, a blanket on top, the sun shines everywhere. My language and I, we don't speak with each other,

we have nothing to say to each other. I know what I have to know, it likes cold food rather than hot, not even the coffee should be hot. This really keeps one busy. This means one has a lot to do, laying out the meal, slicing, measuring the cold, letting the warmth dissipate. While it is staring out at the sea. It's easy for my language to stare because I do everything. I don't rush like I did at the beginning, I calmly smooth the blanket, I calmly weight it with stones when it gets windy, but it's true: I work and it stares. It doesn't even articulate wishes. This wouldn't be the utmost one could ask of it, but it would at least be something. A good thing, a service to me, a way to bring me forward. But this means nothing to it, absolutely nothing, that much I have already gathered. It only stares or listens to the surf, my language. We are always near the sea, I make sure of this. I, not it. I would like to know what would happen to it if once I walked landward, simply turned like other people do, found us a stone table between the hollows, planed pines. How would it then behave, would it come with me? The coastal wind is bad for my ears, I know that. Sometimes I begin to sing or bang the silverware, it gets more quiet. Even though with our food one doesn't need much silverware, I unpack it, plates and glasses, too. I take a knife and let it fall carefully on the plate, always from the same distance. For five weeks it has been getting more quiet. Recently I tried to let the knife fall on the plate from a slightly higher distance. It crashed loudly, I heard it clearly, but the plate broke. My language remained calm, its gaze pinned on the sea, always I believe on the same spot. It seems to me the opposite of certain paintings whose gaze follows you everywhere. Its gaze follows no one. Sea monsters and fishing boats would be equally lost on it, and none come anyway. I then set out our cold meal, pour the cold coffee, but in vain. I have carefully laid our blanket, often even placing a coastal flower in the middle, or next to its plate. It doesn't turn around. I take its plate and put it in front of it, between it and the sea foam. My joy is gone, the hearing test took away my courage, the sea annoys me. My language used to have a lavender shawl, but it's gone. I fear we ruin our health here. If my language loses its voice it has one more reason to stop talking to me.

While I continue to whisper, cough, and besiege it with questions and offers. The lavender shawl suited it well, covering its overly long neck and giving its unspoken appearance both gentleness and resoluteness. This is all gone. It doesn't even turn its collar up. As it is now, it sometimes reminds me of a mature swan, but so pale in color, as if its maturation were still ahead of it. It should not be so vain. From afar I hear the voices of the customs officers. They talk and talk, at least one of them is always talking. It wasn't my idea to settle down so close to the customs booth, but my language refused to go further. The fourth country has ended, I shouted in its ear, the fifth is already over there. It followed me reluctantly, no further than here. We might as well be customs officers. With them also only one does the talking, about food and about youth, while the other sleeps. Or stares at us through the panes, like now. Earlier he was sleeping while I searched for the passports. I don't allow my language to carry them anymore since it lost its shawl, they are now with me.

They are bored over there. Or they find us suspicious. They find my language suspicious, not me. I am normal, I eat and drink, and when I let the knife fall on the plate, from this distance it doesn't look like a hearing test, it looks like clumsiness, and may very well look like it. And yet if we stay here for a while it won't look like clumsiness anymore, but intent. If my language talked to me I wouldn't need this kind of hearing test, but it does very little to keep us unsuspecting. Keep me at least. It should care for me more, should have cared. I suspect it of only caring for itself. Or not caring for itself at all. Or both, lucky for it. It didn't touch what I put in front of it, it lets the sea foam salt it. Each to his own. I hold to this. I can also hold others as mine. I can become a customs chef, a customs entertainer, customs officer. The two over there will not ignore what I put in front of them. We will talk about customs, about customs items, silver and lead and similar things. About card games, I also know card games. And about my language, which I imagine will never move away from here. From its salted meal, its gray gaze. I will do what I can for it.

The conversation alone will help it, the talk about it, the observations that repeat themselves. In time, one will no longer want anything from it. And I will do my part. I will weave a sentence here and there which will make it free of suspicion.

MY GREEN DONKEY

Every day I see a green donkey walking over the railway bridge, its hooves clatter on the planks, its head peaks over the railing. I don't know where it comes from, I have never been able to observe this. But I suspect from the shut-down electricity plant beyond the bridge, where the road runs arrow-straight to the Northwest (a direction that never interested me anyway) and in whose crumbling entranceway in the evenings sometimes soldiers stand, embracing their girls, as soon as it gets dark and only a weak scrap of light lies on the rusty roof. But my donkey comes earlier. Not that it came already at noon, or shortly after, when the glaring sun still pierces into every single one of the abandoned courtyards over there and in between the cracks of the shuttered windows. No, it comes with the first imperceptible weakening of light, then I see it, mostly already up on the footbridge or while it's climbing the stairway up to it. One single time did I see it clattering on the other side of the train tracks, but it looked hurried, as if it were late. By the way it seemed to me at the time as if it were coming in the heat straight out of the half-open and immobile gate of the old electricity plant.

About train employees or other people passing along the bridge it doesn't care, it politely dodges them, and it isn't even bothered by the stomping and whistling of trains that pass underneath the bridge sometimes while it goes over it. Often it turns its head sideways and looks down, mostly when there's no train coming, and never for long. It seems to me then as if it's exchanging a few words with the tracks, but that's probably impossible. And to what end? When it arrives just beyond the middle of the bridge it disappears, after some hesitation, without turning back. About that, namely about the nature of its disappearing, I am not mistaken. And I understand it very well: why should it trouble itself and turn back, since it knows the way after all?

But how does it come, from where does it come, where does it originate? Does it have a mother or a bed of hay in one of the silent courtyards over there? Or does it live in one of the former offices where it has a familiar corner, a piece of wall? Or does it originate like lightning originates, between the former high-tension poles and the dangling lines? Actually, I don't exactly know how lightning originates, I also don't want to know unless my donkey originated the same way. My donkey? That's a big word. But I don't want to take it back. Certainly it's possible that others also see it, but I won't ask them. My donkey, whom I don't feed, don't water, whose coat I don't comb, and whom I don't comfort. But whose silhouette stands out against the far mountains as undoubtedly the mountains themselves stand against the afternoon. For my eyes, thus my donkey. Why should I not confess that I live from the moment that it comes? That its appearance creates the air I breathe, especially it, its silhouette, the shade of its green, and its way of lowering the head and looking down on the tracks? I thought that perhaps it was hungry and looking for the grass and sparse herbs that grow between the railroad ties. But one should restrain one's compassion. I am old enough for that, I will not lay a bundle of hay on the bridge for it. It also doesn't look bad, not starving and not tormented—but not very well either. But there are probably only a few donkeys that do look well. I don't want to repeat old mistakes, I don't want to ask too much of it. I want to be content with expecting it or rather: not expecting it. For it doesn't come regularly. Did I forget to say that? Twice already it did not come. I write this hesitatingly because perhaps this is its rhythm, perhaps, for it, there is nothing like twice, and it always came, came regularly, and would be astonished at this lament. As it seems to be astonished about many things. Astonishment, yes, that's what describes it best, distinguishes it, I believe. Concerning it, I want to learn to confine myself to guesswork, later even to less. But until then there's still a lot that troubles me. More than its possible hunger, for example, the fact that I don't know the location of its sleep, of its rest, and therefore also of its birth. For it requires rest. It could even be that every time it requires death, I don't know. I consider it

exhausting, as green as it is, to go every evening over the bridge, to look as it does, and to disappear at the right moment.

Such a donkey needs rest, a lot of rest. And the question is whether an old electricity plant is the right place for this, whether it suffices? Whether the dangling electric lines caress it softly enough, once it's not there, during its night? For its night is longer than ours. And whether the silhouettes of the mountains sufficiently prove their friendship to it, during its day? For its day is shorter. As always, I don't know. And I won't find out, because my aim can only be to know less and less about it, this much I've already learned during the half year that it has been coming. Learned from it. And so perhaps I will also learn to endure if one day it won't come any more, for this is what I fear. It could perhaps stay away with the cold, and this could also be part of its coming as its coming itself. Until then I want to learn to know so little about it that I will be able to endure its staying away, that I will then no longer direct my eyes on the bridge.

But until I'm ready for this I sometimes dream that it might have a green father and a green mother, a bundle of hay in one of the courtyards over there, and in its ears the laughter of the young people pressing themselves into the entranceway. That it sometimes sleeps instead of dying.

Translated from the German by Christian Hawkey and Uljana Wolf.

PROTEAN WOODS

Cathy Park Hong

In the pollen furred woods, the air floats with fair fauna,
white squidlettes with poppy seed eyes,

centipedal thorns, satin puff-bellied flowers,
ready to suck in any powdery
swarm of nits,

a brook choked with so much citrus algae,
it glugs like lava, which is sipped
by a long-nosed creature

who uses its glass-twining antlers to break
away a raft of branches,

to reveal a colony, men as big as the O
on this page,

muscular and ranting, then sleeping,
then swallowed.

from APNEA

Michael Hansen

I woke up.

In the Law. Iron leaves tick ticking.

There. Nothing. I looked.
Under.

The Law

Iron field. Iron field.
Animals.

Like integers chalked in.
There.

past [1] warm
lean-to bodies

limned together [2] black stick
boats past

[3] lunged aspens
ringing

his [4] discarded daylight
shirt & hat

his [5] notes my
notes in little nests there

black suit, big pig, big pulp tongue
for a face

LINES: I AM NOT JOHN CLARE

Matt Hart

I am a barker by profession
I am a badger with a touch
I lean upon the windowsill
 and view the world
 as a pheasant [sic] dream
I wish to be or not
 or else
always to remember thee
A mouthful of worms
The unhinged trees
Puddocks, buzzards, etc.
I envy them their wings
I wish the devil luck
 In Allen's madhouse caged and living
 In mellow shades no pencil e'er conveys
The bookman eats grass, then kicks
Poesy is over the wall
Poesy's power, overpowering sweet
I love at long last the breakneck hills
I love to hear the evening crows
I sit on a bench in June ensnared
 and pleased
in my loneliness
 I long to stay forever
I snap at the air
with my solid gold head
 Unequalled raptures
 Happiest happinesses

CENTO CORSO III

A white apple falls from the loneliest tree

Out of nowhere into nowhere

I am no better than thee

American woof Grumble and haw

O the sick fragility, the incompetence of dogs

What oafish What mannered

What damned juxtaposition

Samothrace! Coat rack! Centaur! Panda!

I would shake your devils Every last one

SEA

Britta Ameel

I want octopi
the size of whole oceans
to swallow and suck my lost
body through the straw
of my nipple, blow
bones out like ink,
a sticky trail of blue ribbon—
tangle of kelp, fish tricks.
Breed me as an eel,
pack me full of vinegar,
rub my openings with salt,
let the water run from
my orifices, fill
empty pools of light
at low tide. Anemones
will settle and suckle
in my tidal baths.
Leave only core of mouth,
spidery tentacles,
external veins
of moon jellies, harvested
phosphorescence,
internal cord of navel.
Reduce me to a reproducible
shape, starfish that grows
another arm for the sake
of another sucking arm.
I want to intake and expel

through the same hole—
the cuttlefish's tongue
its lips its swallow its sex
its eye. Bleed my pigment
newly dry, transparent white,
nothing left but light,
stream it through me;
man-of-war, sting.

O CANADA

Genya Turovskaya

I ran my hand through the weeds
of that great northern lawn
and my palm became
 long and blonde
as the impossible
hair of my love

In faraway beds
in Tulum in Mandalay
my love runs his palm through
 with brown thread

My long blonde palm dangles
 rustling
 in Pacific wind

O Canada always in the dark
your head swims above me
 a phosphorescent fish

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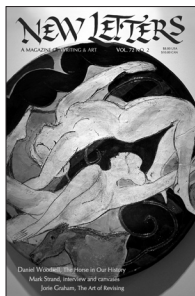
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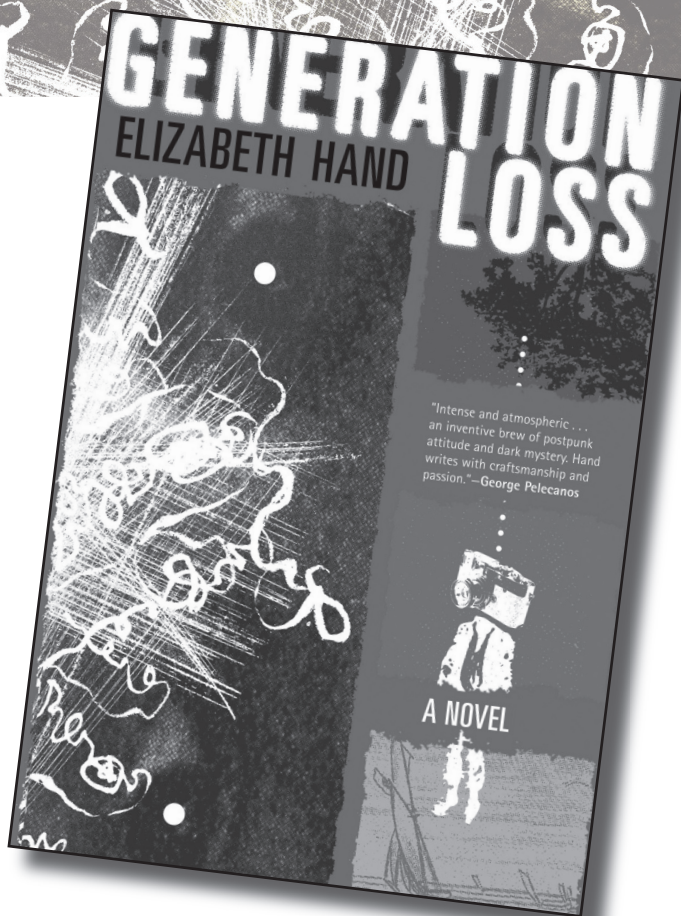
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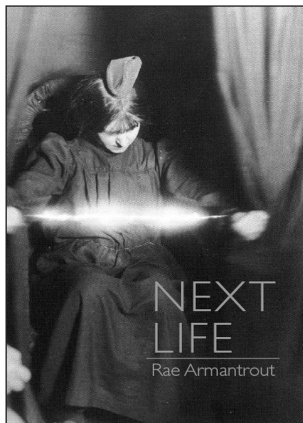
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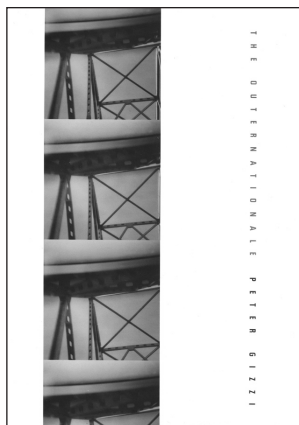
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